

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE ANNUAL

1971
SUMMER
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**DEATH ROLLS
THE DICE**

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by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

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Over the years, many, many readers out of the hundred thousands of *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine* fans have written suggesting that we bring out a fat-size annual — and, finally, here it is.

With pardonable pride, therefore, we present herewith the first big MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE ANNUAL, a must for crime fiction buffs everywhere.

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This special edition will appear annually. It is truly a treasure drawer collection of splendid tales, each one guaranteed to bring you to your enjoyment.

Good reading!

LEO MARGULIES
Publisher

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NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL DEATH ROLLS THE DICE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

She was smart and tough. Don Byrne's daughter. But now she had vanished without a trace. "Mike Shayne," the gambler said, "get the man who took my girl. Dead or alive. Just bring my daughter back unharmed — if you have to kill to do it."

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DEATH ROLLS THE DICE

Big Don Byrne's girl was gone, vanished without a trace. "Shayne," the gambler said, "she's mine and I want her back. If you have to kill, do it. Just bring my daughter back alive..."

By BRETT HALLIDAY



THE BLONDE GIRL looked at the dice in her hand. She shook them back and forth tentatively. Then she dropped first one and then the other on the faded green cover of the table where the game was being rolled.

"Damn it," she said. "Those dice are crooked."

The men in the room looked back at her. She was young, with shoulder length, naturally wavy hair and white, soft, meticulously tended skin. Her

cashmere sweater had cost seventy dollars in a store on Miami Beach's Lincoln Road. Her slacks cost probably twice as much. There was a string of matched pearls around the soft, slender throat and a big emerald ring on her right hand.

"I said these dice are crooked," she repeated. "Just what sort of fool do you rednecks think I am anyway?"

The men just went on looking at her. There were five of them, all dressed in the faded

khaki shirts and pants, heavy high laced shoes and white cotton socks that are almost a uniform in parts of the rural deep South. In spite of the heat in the completely enclosed room two of them still had on sweat-stained black felt broad-brimmed hats.

Only the fat man was shaved and clean. He had a Mexican silver belt buckle set with fire opals and a three-carat diamond ring on the little finger of his left hand. The others waited for him to speak.

The girl looked at him defiantly with fire flashing out of her china blue eyes and lips set in a thin line of anger. "Well," she said "why don't you say something?"

"We figure," the fat man said evenly and not unkindly, "you're just about four thousand dollars worth of fool, Miss."

She flinched. That was the amount she'd already lost. It was a lot of money, but in her family it wasn't a disaster. Wisdom told her to accept the loss and get out of there.

Then the old man with the trickle of tobacco juice at the corner of his loose-lipped mouth sniggered.

It made up her mind.

"That's just where you're wrong," she said. "I want my money back."

The old man sniggered again. "Right now," the girl said viciously. "I want it back, all four thousand of it. I'm not about to be taken like some stupid tourist."

"You already have been, Ma'am," the tow-headed boy against the back wall said.

"I won't stand for it," she said. "I told you I won't stand still for this sort of robbery. I'll teach you stupid rednecks who you've fooled with this time."

"Just what you think you can do?" a voice asked.

"I can go to your sheriff."

"Mebbe he won't take your word for nothin', Ma'am. He just might not believe you."

"He will," she said with certainty. "Don't you know a lady when you see one? My father's a friend of the governor of this two-bit State. You just wait. If I don't get my money back, your sheriff will listen even if one of you's his own brother."

"He just might at that," the voice said doubtfully.

The fat man stirred and spoke for the first time:

"Now see here, Miss," he said in a more cultivated tone. "No use arguing with them boys. You want to talk business around here, it's with me you got to talk—and I don't think my advise would be to bother Sheriff Henly none."



"All right then," she said. "If you were me, just what do you think you'd do?"

"I'd just forget the whole thing," he said easily. "Nobody really made you come in here; you know. Nobody put a gun to your head to make you roll them dice. You're a big girl and

you been around. I know that well as you do."

"Just forget it?" she asked.

"About that," he said. "For folks as important as you look to be this here amount's chicken feed. It won't take the bread outen no baby's mouth if you just charge it off. Call it the

price of improving your education, Miss. Just a contribution to the college of hard-knocks, so to speak."

She almost accepted it.

The dirty old man sniggered again.

Her hand went into the expensive soft leather shoulder bag she wore and came out with a wicked little nickle-plated twenty-five caliber automatic pistol. The light from the single overhead bulb in the room glinted off its bright finish.

"I want that money," she said, "and I want it right now. Don't waste my time. I don't want to shoot any of you, but you'd better believe I will if I have to."

One of the men moved his elbow just enough to knock the light switch on the wall to the OFF position. Although it was still early afternoon outside, the room was windowless, and suddenly pitch black.

The girl gasped. All around her she heard the shuffle of feet and the heavy breathing as the men closed in around her. She felt stifled in the heavy, hot dark. The taste of panic and of rage was bitter in her mouth.

"Just don't make no more trouble," the fat man's smooth accents said from somewhere to her right. "Just drop that there pea shooter on the floor so's we can hear it fall. We don't aim to

hurt you. No, we purely don't."

Her voice shrilled back at him in the closed in space. "Turn on the light. Let me out of here or I'll shoot."

One of them lunged at her, and she screamed. There was a clash of bodies. Curses. The gun went off.

"Oh God!" said a man's voice. "What we goin' to do now?"

There was the slam of another shot.

MIKE SHAYNE, *private detective*, looked at the big man sitting across the desk in his Flagler Street, Miami, office.

"Why haven't you notified the Missing Persons Bureau?" the redhead asked. "I'm sure they can help you."

The expensively dressed man with the greying black hair and the cold blue eyes reached into his breast pocket for a gold-bound snakeskin wallet.

"If I wanted the law, I'd do just that," he said. "I want you, Shayne. The cops would love the chance to laugh at me, and that's about all they would do."

"There's honest cops," Shayne said. "You're entitled to the protection of the law no matter who you are."

"I said I wanted you, Shayne. I can't afford to be laughed at by cops or anybody else. If the cops didn't laugh in

my face, some of my—uh—business associates would for sure. That would be bad for business. It might mean I'd have to kill somebody. Besides, I want my daughter back."

"Of course you do," said Mike Shayne's beautiful confidential secretary from the adjoining desk where she was taking shorthand notes of the conversation. "That's the most important thing."

"We'll stick to that then," Shayne said. "Suppose you give me the story. Do you believe your daughter's been kidnaped?"

"I don't know," Donald Byrne said. "I swear I don't know. She just dropped out of sight. If she had been kidnaped at least I'd know how to deal with it. As it is, it could be anything. Even—"

His voice trailed away. For a man who bossed the booking of football pool bets for half the Eastern United States, he wasn't used to indecision or doubt. They showed up poorly on him.

Lucy Hamilton, Shayne's secretary, divined what he was thinking.

"No," she said in quick sympathy. "You mustn't even think such a thing, Mr. Byrne. I'm sure we'll find your daughter well and with some perfectly normal explanation."



Perhaps she just stopped over to visit a friend and forgot to let you know her plans. Young girls do get thoughtless sometimes."

"Not my Bonnie," Byrne said. "She's only nineteen, but

she stopped being a young girl a long time ago. Ever since her mother died six years ago Bonnie's been more like a partner to me than a daughter. She's got a grown woman's head and courage. We're in a rough business, Shayne. You know that well enough. Bonnie doesn't go visiting without letting me know. She just doesn't."

"What do you think happened?" Shayne asked.

"I said I don't know. It's been a week now since I had any word from her. That means she's in some sort of trouble. What sort I can't even guess. I'm hiring you to find out for me."

He opened the wallet and took out a neat stack of crisp, clean hundred dollar bills.

"There's five thousand dollars here for a retainer. There'll be five more if you find her without trouble. If it's rough going, you can count on me to pay extra for whatever you may have to do. Just name any figure in reason."

"If you feel that strongly," Shayne said, "why pick me?"

"Because I've heard you're loyal to your clients and pure death to your enemies. Because I know you get off your duff and solve your cases even if you have to risk your own neck to do it. In short, because the

word's out that a man can trust Mike Shayne."

"I try to operate that way," Shayne said. "Now let me have what facts you've got."

"I haven't got much. About ten days ago she decided to drive up to New York for some shopping. Usually we fly when we go anywhere, but Bonnie likes to drive and she likes to see the country. Also this way she could drop in on some of the bookies I-service in the towns along the way and talk business. She's done it for me before."

"The personal touch," Mike Shayne said.

"That's right. In my business we don't like to put anything in writing, let alone in the mail also phones can be tapped. Bonnie knows my business and she can remember figures like a filing system on legs.

"Anyway she was right on schedule through Jacksonville. Called me from the hotel there to say she was okay. That's the last word I've had from her, and that's a week ago."

Byrne got up and walked over to the window looking down at the Flagler Street crowds. Then he swung back to face the big detective.

"I've called all my contacts for hundreds of miles in every direction from Jacksonville. I've called newspapermen I know,

even had discreet inquiries made with the police. As far as I can find she hasn't been arrested. She isn't in a hospital. There's no record of her car being in an accident. I've called our friends in the area. Nobody's seen hide or hair of her."

"People don't vanish without leaving some sort of trace." Lucy Hamilton said.

"That's what I used to think too. I just hope you're right. Anyway it's up to Mike Shayne to find out for me. I'm just going crazy. No word. Absolutely no news of any kind at all. I love my daughter, Shayne. I want her found. If it takes every dime I have and can raise. No matter what you have to do to find her, I want her back."

"I'll do my best," Mike Shayne said. "First I'll need facts about your girl. Anything that could give me any sort of clue, no matter how slim."

MIKE SHAYNE drove north by the roads Bonnie Byrne had used. He ate in the same restaurants, stopped at the same motels. He called on and talked to the people she was known to have seen, and even located a couple of contacts she hadn't bothered to tell her father about.

All the way up U.S. Highway 1, the long curving spine on

which the towns and cities of the Florida East Coast were strung like shining jewels, he did his best to duplicate the trip the girl had made.

He checked into the same downtown Jacksonville hotel and even managed to get the same room the girl had occupied. It was just a hotel room. There was nothing at all unusual about it or about any of the places he'd been or the people he'd talked to on the whole trip.

Up till this point each stop had led neatly and logically to the next. He'd been able to track Bonnie Byrne with the exercise of only ordinary professional competence.

After Jacksonville her next stop might as well have been the moon.

Bonnie had been scheduled to visit one of her father's bookies in a town near Waycross, Georgia, on the edge of the great Okefenokee Swamp. She hadn't checked in.

Mike Shayne found her contact, a store owner by the name of Bill Radey. When he presented his letter of introduction from Donald Byrne he was taken into the private office in the rear of the hardware and sporting goods store.

"I never saw her at all," Radey said emphatically. "Of course I know Bonnie. Seen her



with her father lots of times in Miami and Atlanta. We're old friends. Had she come through town she'd have stopped to eat with Millie and me even had Don not sent her on business."

"She was scheduled to see you."

"Of course she was. Don told me so ahead of time on the phone. I was looking for her all that day and the next. Then I figured she'd mebbe gone the other way—along the coast to Brunswick and Savannah, I mean. So I didn't think nothing more about it till Don called again the other day. Has something happened to her, Mr. Shayne?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out," Mike Shayne said. "If it has, and anything you can find out or might hear could help locate her, I know Byrne would be grateful."

"I'd surely help if I could. I know Don sets a real sight by that girl. Don't blame him neither. She's a smart one and pretty as a picture."

"He made that clear," Mike Shayne said. Then he thought it a good idea to add, "I suppose you know too what will happen to anybody who had a hand in the girl vanishing. That is, I mean, just supposing there might have been some sort of foul play."

with bright eyes and red cheeks. Now he paled visibly.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Shayne. I can guess. I don't rightly think I want to know. Not really know, you understand. I can guess and that's bad enough. Donald Byrne is a hard man."

"So he is," Mike Shayne said. "So am I. That's why he asked me to look into this for him. He wants his girl, and what he told me is anything goes. So long as I get her back for him, there's no limit to what I can do. Just no limit at all."

He stood up and let his jacket fall back so the little bookie could see the big black gun in its belt holster behind his right hip.

"Should it be I can't find her," the detective said. "I'd not like to be in the shoes of any man who could even possibly have known of it. Let alone had a hand in things."

"I don't know nothing," Radey said. "Ain't a bit of use in the world you threatening me, Mr. Shayne. I'd help you if I could, sir. Just purely I would."

"I'll tell Mr. Byrne," Shayne said. "He'll ask me."

"I hope so," Radey said. "Are you positive she came up this way at all, Mr. Shayne? I mean couldn't she have changed her mind and taken another

road? I'm sure she had other folks to talk to besides me."

"She took this road," Shayne said. "At least she stopped for gas just outside of Jacksonville. The man at the station remembers the fancy sports car she was driving. His station's on the highway leading right up here."

Radey shuffled his feet and appeared to think things over.

"If you're sure," he said, "and if I was you, I'd go talk to Sheriff Dan Henly. He'd know things if anybody would in this whole county."

"He's already been queried by phone. Every police authority between Miami and New York has been called."

"Wouldn't pay no heed to that. Not at all." There was a shrewd look on Radey's face. "Routine A.P.B.'s one thing, you know. We're country folks out this way. Don't pay too much heed to such city doings. Man like you coming in in person, now that could be something else again. Was I you, I'd drop by and talk to old Dan. Yes, I would purely do just that."

It seemed to Mike Shayne that there was some meaning hidden behind the little storekeeper's words. He couldn't be sure, let alone pick up the whole connotation, but the man spoke with a tone that

carried some sense of urgency.

In his years as a detective, Mike Shayne had picked up his own special psychic radar for spotting things of importance. This could well be one of them.

The three story, red brick county courthouse with its mansard roof and wide stone steps was just across the town square from Radey's store. Mike Shayne walked under hundred-year-old live oak trees festooned with ragged beards of Spanish moss and past the ornate, wood and cast-iron bandstand in the center of the little park. A gaggle of local senior citizens on the long wooden benches at the top of the courthouse steps interrupted their private meditations to watch him approach.

The sheriff's office was on the ground floor around at the side of the courthouse. The door was unlocked, so Mike Shayne pushed it open and went on in. There were three desks impartially covered with dust and a litter of papers, dirty coffee mugs and sandwich and cigarette wrappers, but nobody sat any one of them.

The usual bulletin board with its photos, and wanted-man broadcasts covered one wall. On the other side was a gunrack holding shotguns and ancient lever-action Winchester. A door in the back led

to a corridor and the two iron barred, wooden bunked jail cells.

Shayne sat down back of one of the desks and put his feet up on its top. He gave the town grapevine ten minutes to notify the sheriff that he had a visitor from out of town.

Actually that was an overestimate. In exactly six minutes after the door closed behind the Miami private detective it opened again and Sheriff Dan Henly walked into his own office.

The sheriff didn't meet Shayne's stature by a good five inches, but he could have matched the city man pound for pound on the scales. Not an ounce of it was fat either. Sheriff Henly was all heavy bone and tight rolls of corded muscle. He looked as if he could go into the bull ring without cape or sword and throw the bull over the fence if it objected.

He wore the usual faded khaki, a hundred dollar white broad-brimmed Stetson hat and a heavy leather belt with cartridge loops and a holstered forty-five Colt's revolver. Incongruously, his shoes were fine leather handmade Swiss imports instead of the cowboy boots Shayne had expected to see.

"Get out of my chair," he

Mike Shayne stood up.

The sheriff swung a looping right for the big man's chin. Only Mike Shayne's incredible reaction speed saved him from being knocked off his feet. He rolled away from the punch, blocking instinctively with his left hand.

He hit the sheriff a hard, short right in the belly. It was like hitting a steel oil drum. The shorter man rocked back on his heels, but he didn't go down. They stood and looked at each other, each man wondering if the other would go for his gun. For a minute it was touch and go. Then they both grinned.

"I'm Dan Henly," the man in khaki said. "You got business with me?"

Mike Shayne relaxed. "Business, yes," he said. "Anything else no."

The other man dug into the bottom drawer of the desk where Shayne had been sitting and came up with a quart mason jar full of amber liquid. He took two of the china coffee mugs into the back and rinsed them at a washstand. Then he poured some of the liquid into each and offered one to the city man.

"Couple friends of mine make this in the swamp," he said. "Ol' Cooter's a conservative. Won't bottle in nothing

but the same jars his gran'daddy used."

They both drank. The stuff almost took the roof off Mike Shayne's mouth. He thought his teeth were going to dissolve, and the tears came to his eyes.

"Ol' Cooter makes a fine man's drink," the sheriff said. "Always says there's nothin' like tossing in a dead possum to strengthen the mash."

"I've drunk smoother," Shayne said, "but never stronger."

Henly laughed. "Okay then, friend. Suppose you tell me the business that brings you out our way. We're just simple country boys here, and we seldom handle city type affairs."

Mike Shayne told him. The sheriff sat down behind his desk and listened impassively, asking no questions and offering no comment till the big detective had finished.

Then he said: "I can't help you, friend."

"How's that?" Mike Shayne asked.

"This here girl you're looking for ain't even been in my county. Had she been—as good looking as you say and driving a red and gold foreign sports car—it'd create more commotion than a old-fashioned circus parade. I'd have heard of it and so would every man woman and child clear to t'other side the

swamp. I ain't heard about her—so she ain't been."

"She started this way," Shayne said.

"Then she stopped short of here. Was I you, friend, I'd go on back where I came from."

"What I'm going to do," Shayne said, "is cover every step of the road and stop at every house and hollow stump from here to Jacksonville and then on north to Canada if I have to. A woman and a car don't just melt away, Sheriff. You know it. And a car like that is hard to hide, not to speak of a corpse. I'll find what I have to find."

The sheriff tilted his chair back and put his feet on the desk just as Shayne had done a little before.

"That could take a powerful lot of time," he said.

"The girl's father's paying for the time," Shayne said. "If it takes the rest of my life, he's paying."

"Could take just that," Henly said. He took another drink, this time straight from the mason jar itself. He didn't show any more reaction than if it had been water.

"I mean," he continued, "it might just take the rest of your life. Folks round here they just don't take naturally to a stranger come nosing round. Some things that girl's daddy



can't buy. Not even if he's the richest gambling man God ever saw."

"How did you know he was a gambling man?" Shayne asked. "I never said."

SHERIFF DAN HENLY never changed expression. He looked straight at the big city man.

"You must have told me, friend," he said easily. "How else could I have known?"

It was a challenge, and Shayne knew it. He considered calling the lawman's bluff and forcing his hand but rejected the notion. Time enough for that later on when he had more cards in his own hand to play.

So far all he knew was that Bonnie Byrne apparently hadn't gotten past this town. He was

beginning to believe that she had come at least this far and that the sheriff knew a lot more than he wanted to let on.

"You haven't answered my question," Henly said. "How would I know?"

"Maybe God told you," Mike Shayne said.

"Better take my advice," Henly said. "Take all the time you want. Till sundown maybe."

"Is that a threat?"

"I hadn't just decided, friend. You suit yourself about that."

"That's right," Shayne said. "That's exactly right. That's what I aim to do. You've got a job, Sheriff, and I have a job too. I hope they don't clash because I like you, but if they do, each of us has got to suit himself."

When Mike Shayne turned to leave the office he almost collided with a man coming in. He was a fat man, so fat that he filled the narrow doorway from side to side. He wore an expensive suit, not at all countrified, and a pair of hand-made shoes like Sheriff Henly's. He'd have been at home in an exclusive Atlanta or Baltimore club except for the big, Mexican silver belt buckle he wore. It blazed with fire sparks, as Shayne couldn't help but notice.

They met on the threshold. The fat man didn't hesitate at all. He just kept coming as if the notion of his giving way to the other man, out of courtesy or for any other reason, was too ridiculous to consider.

Mike Shayne stood fast. The fat man stopped an instant before his big belly would have rammed into Shayne. He looked at the detective with coldly appraising eyes. The tension held for seconds, then as if by mutual agreement each man took a step to his left. They managed to pass without touching and without either one having given ground.

The sheriff sat back of his desk. He didn't actually laugh, but he looked as if he wanted to.

"Mr. Shayne," he said without getting up, "I'd like for you to meet Pete Lutterback. Pete's one of our leading citizens in these parts. Mr. Shayne is a criminologist from the big town of Miami, Pete."

Shayne said: "Glad to meet you."

The fat man said nothing at all.

"Glad to see you fellows hit it off so well," Dan Henly said. Then he did laugh.

Mike Shayne walked back across the town square under the live oak trees. Some children were playing a listless

game of catch on the grass. Heat lay like a palpable blanket over the somnolent little town.

The lobby of the town's single hotel dozed under a thin layer of dust. The elderly clerk looked a little as if he needed dusting too. He shoved the register around for Mike Shayne to sign and gave him a corner room in front.

The big man took his bag out of the trunk of his car and carried it up to the second floor by himself. The hotel only boasted three floors and no elevator.

Shayne stretched out on the surprisingly comfortable bed for an hour of afternoon sleep. He figured he'd likely need it before the night was over.

He woke to the sound of a gentle rapping on the room door. He stood up in his sock feet and walked silently across the worn carpet. Then he flipped the door open with a motion so fast as to catch whoever was outside by surprise.

It wasn't needed.

There was only a Negro boy about seventeen years old standing in the corridor outside the door. He handed the big detective a sealed envelope and stood there looking rather hopefully.

Mike Shayne gave the boy a dollar bill and saw his eyes

widen with surprise and pleasure. Apparently no answer to the letter was expected, for the boy went off, shoving the folded bill into one pocket of his blue jeans.

Shayne closed and locked his room door before he tore open the envelope. There was a single sheet of paper on which someone had typed a brief message.

"Come out to the Full Moon Cafe tonight. I'll talk to you there. Important." That was all. There wasn't even a signature.

The detective tore the note and envelope into small strips and burned them in the big glass ash tray that came with the room. He put the ashes in the toilet and flushed them down.

After that he shaved, took a shower in the tepid water from the tap and dressed. He took his money and gun with him when he went out. Aside from that he didn't even lock his luggage. He figured it would likely be searched in any case and he didn't want the locks smashed or the fabric slashed.

The less trouble they had to go to, the less damage they'd be likely to do.

Mike Shayne had a very good notion the answers he wanted lay somewhere in this little rural town.

THE TOWN had only one restaurant which boasted a long wooden counter and five small tables. Mike Shayne sat at the counter where he could chat with the waitress.

He ate countrified steak with grits, boiled pole beans, boiled squash and colard greens boiled with a piece of pork fat. There was heavy brown gravy and unsalted country butter to go with the biscuits. The dessert was a piece of pecan pie which reminded the city man of old army blanket soaked in molasses and left out in the heat and dust for a week. He settled for strong coffee.

The waitress wanted to talk. She viewed the big detective with an approving eye undaunted by the obviously jealous glare from the proprietor. He gathered she was available for a date that night, and finally managed to convey that he wasn't.

"Maybe tomorrow night if I'm still in town, the Miami detective said.

"Oh? How long you stay-in?"

"That all depends on how long it takes to finish the the job I came to do."

"Oh," she said again and leaned across the counter so that he could look down the dress at her heavy breasts. "In that case, sugar you likely to

be here quite some time. Yeah man. Quite some time."

"If you're in town too, that could be easy to take."

She looked pleased and poked her dyed blonde hair.

"How come you figure you know what business brought me here?" Shayne asked and put more sugar into his cup of coffee.

She gave him a knowing look. "Sho', sugar, you forget how small a town this is. Ever'body knows all about a stranger most before he gits his car parked. For sure before he gits his shoes off."

"Just you show me where to put the shoes," Shayne said and smiled. "Since you all know so much maybe you can tell me what I want to know."

"Oh no," she said. "No, no, sugar. I got nothing to do with that sort of business."

"I can pay. At least my boss can."

"Forget it, sugar. I don't know nothin' about no blonde woman. Nothin'." She suddenly found business in the kitchen.

Mike Shayne drank his coffee alone after that. He wondered how the woman had known that Bonnie Byrne was blonde. Too many people in this little town seemed to know too many things that they shouldn't normally do. To the redhead it was significant.

On the other hand he shouldn't underestimate the local grapevine or overestimate it either. Bill Radey, the bookie, knew why Shayne was in town. He'd also seen and talked to Bonnie Byrne on other occasions.

Radey wasn't supposed to talk, but of course that was no guarantee that he hadn't. Donald Byrne had set inquiries on foot all up and down the highways also. News of these could have quickly reached the town.

It was hard to think that Bonnie wouldn't have heard them herself, if she was anywhere in the area. That is, if she was still alive.

After he ate, Mike Shayne strolled through the business section of the small country town. It wasn't hard to cover. There were only a few blocks of stores and business establishments. Mostly they existed to serve the country people who came into town on Saturday night. During the week they closed early. Even the restaurant pulled down its heavy shades and locked the door before seven-thirty.

The drug store stayed open, and there were lights in one other building a block back of the square. When Mike Shayne walked that way he noted that it was the funeral parlor. He



wondered who was being prepared for burial.

He had to go into the drug store anyway to ask directions to the Full Moon Cafe. He talked to the proprietor.

"How come the funeral parlor's working late."

"It's a hot climate," the man said. "We bury 'em fast."

"Oh, I guess you would," Shayne said. "Who is it this time?"

"Old Pop Minders. Thought ever'body knew that."

The detective let it go at that.

The Full Moon Cafe, it appeared, was the local version of wild night life.

"Just take the old two-lane hardtop over towards Waycross. About seven miles from town

where it skirts the swamp you'll hit the Full Moon. Can't miss her, stranger, even if you tried."

After five miles of piney woods punctuated by an occasional farm clearing Shayne was sure he couldn't miss anything livelier than a possum on a stump. Then he began to see the neon lights shine a long way up the road through the pines.

When he got there the Full Moon was a blaze of lights even on a weekday evening. There were red, blue and yellow neons all over the buildings—for the place was a whole complex of buildings. The main house had been a stately home at some time in the past and was still fronted with a white columned verandah. There were other buildings in back that had been barns and service quarters. One now held a liquor package store. Off to the side were a dozen or more strictly modern motel units.

Several cars were parked near the big house and a loud beat of juke box music sounded from within. Mike Shayne put his own car with the rest.

The big man went in the main entrance and found that that the whole front of the building on the ground floor had been converted to a bar and lounge. At one end was a platform to hold a small

orchestra, but it was empty of players. Except on weekends the place would depend on the juke.

Shayne bellied up to the bar and ordered brandy. When he saw the cheap label on the bottle he regretted the fact, but poured himself a double anyway. There were only two couples and three or four single men in the place. Everybody was drinking with a sort of single-minded concentration.

Mike Shayne took his time with the raw, off-brand spirits. The bartender paid no more attention to him. He was busy with a pencil and a cross-word puzzle.

The woman came in from somewhere in the back of house. She made no effort to conceal her interest in the city private detective, but walked over at once to stand at his shoulder.

"You Mike Shayne?" It was more of a statement than a question.

"That's me."

"I'm Sally Watters. It was me sent you the note. Did Sam charge you for that swill you're drinking?"

Shayne said nothing.

"Sam, give the man his money back. I told you this one was to the house."

Sam took money out of the register and put it on the bar.

He looked disgusted. Shayne accepted the money.

"Thanks," he said to Sally.

Then he put a five dollar bill on the bar.

"For your trouble," he said to the astonished Sam.

The woman put back her head and laughed. She had a soft white throat and full breasts. She was neither young nor old, but her figure was good. She wore naturally red hair cut shoulder length and her eyes were green and almost luminous like a cat's in the bright lights.

"If that don't take the rag off'n the bush," she to nobody in particular. "The boys won't believe it when we tell it round. Will they, Sam?"

Then to Shayne. "Okay, sport. You're a big man or a damn fool—one."

"Both maybe," Mike Shayne said. "You said you wanted to see me."

"I didn't want to see you," Sally Watters answered. "I had business to do with you. Now I'm not so sure. Anyway come on in the back. I got some good brandy waiting for you there."

"You have?" Mike Shayne asked. "How did you know I drink brandy? Every soul up here knows things about me."

"Easy enough, sport," she said. "We're country folk here but we got cousins in Miami we

can call when we want to know about a man from there."

She led him through a door back of the bar into a big sprawling kitchen where a slovenly fry cook dozed in a wooden rocker, and then up a flight of stairs to what had to be her own apartments. They were expensively furnished in modern style.

"Gambling rooms in the front on this floor," she said, "but we don't open them much except Saturday nights."

"Or when you catch a real live tourist?" Shayne asked.

"You mean like that girl you're looking for?" Sally asked. "Could be, but that one never set foot in this place. I'll swear that by my mother's grave, sport. She never come in this place or down this road. Believe me?"

"I think so. Would you let me search?"

"If Dan Henly comes with you or you get Judge Henly to give you a warrant, yes. Oh hell, you can look anyway if you want. I've nothing to hide here."

"Then why did you send for me?"

"All in good time, sport. First let me fix us a drink. Then we talk."

The room they were in was a living room with a small built-in bar in one corner. She got a

bottle of excellent French brandy and a couple of glasses and a pitcher of ice water and brought them over to the coffee table in front of the couch where Mike Shayne was sitting. When she sat down beside him her mini-skirt rode up to show a lot of thigh.

"Okay," Shayne said. "What do you know about Bonnie Byrne?"

"About her, nothing. I said I'd level with you, sport, and I will. I never set eyes on your kitten. I do know who her father is, though. That's why I wanted to see you."

She paused. Shayne drank some of his brandy and said nothing. Once she'd started, he wanted her to do the talking all the way.

"I know Donald Byrne is strictly big-time," she said finally. "If he sent you, Mike, that means you're tough too. You won't give up till he tells you to, and he won't tell you till he gets his daughter back. Am I right, sport?"

Mike Shayne nodded and took another swallow of brandy.

"That's why I'm telling you to get out of this county. If you stay, there'll be people hurt. Some of them good friends of mine. You too. I don't want to see you hurt. You believe me?"

"I believe you," Shayne said. "Only who's to get hurt if nobody here ever saw Bonnie Byrne? Why can't I just do my job and find out you're all correct about not seeing her, and then move on up the line? Seems to me for innocent bystanders you people get mighty stirred up."

"You don't understand," she said and put her hand over his. Her palm was moist and hot. There was desire in the eyes she turned to his. "Folks here resent strangers. You poke around, and you'll find things out you shouldn't know. Not about your little girl friend. Other things. Things could hurt people who never done you no harm."

"I'm not a cop," Shayne said. "I don't care who runs a still."

"The man who cooks it does," she said. "That ain't all. You're a damn fool, Mike Shayne. You'll nose around till they come after you. Then they'll kill you. But you're a fighting man. Nobody's going to take you easy. There'll be more dead and hurt before they pull you down. I don't want to see that. Not when it's all to no use at all, I don't."

"You can stop it easy enough," Mike Shayne said.

"Just tell me where I can find

Bonnie Byrne. That's all. If she isn't hurt, then nobody else gets hurt either. Donald Byrne's a practical man. He just wants his daughter back safe and sound."

"I tell you I don't know nothing about the girl."

Mike Shayne ignored the interruption.

"On the other hand," he continued, "If she's been hurt or killed, he'll never give up till he has the people did it. Not if he has to send in an army and kill half the men, women and children in the county. The quicker you tell me the truth, honey, the fewer get hurt and the sooner it's over."

"There's nothing to tell. I swear."

"You've sworn enough," he said. "Whether you had a hand in it or not, I don't care. Tell me the truth. The trail I'm on leads into this county, but it doesn't lead out again. Like a fox gone to ground. I'm going to dig out the fox."

She caught his arm in a grip as strong as a man's. "Suppose I do? Suppose your Mr. Byrne finds out something he don't want to know? Suppose it could be worse for him than not to find out at all?"

"You'd better explain that."

"No," she said. "As God's my witness, Mike Shayne, that's the last word I say. Stay here and we'll finish the bottle and

have us a party till morning. Then drive on. North or South is all one. Drive on and forget this county. Please."

"I can't do that," Shayne said. "I've a job to do."

"Then it's on your head," she said. "I've warned you, and that's all I can do. It's on your head."

IT WAS ANOTHER hour before Mike Shayne walked out of the Full Moon Cafe to his car, but Sally Watters had kept her word. She'd said absolutely nothing more about the missing Bonnie Byrne.

"Why did she bother at all?" Shayne thought as he walked to his car. "If I wasn't to hear any more than that, why bring me this far out of town? I could have been told at the hotel, or the sheriff could have done it himself."

Then he shrugged. Whether she knew it or not—and he was fairly sure that she didn't—Sally had told him something he very badly needed to know. He had a piece of information now that could very well solve the whole case for him.

He drove back into town as fast as his car could manage the old and twisted road. All the way he kept his eyes wide open, half anticipating a bushwacking attempt. It would have been easy enough to have had people



waiting to gun him down if Sally had failed to convince him.

Shayne had his own big forty-five lying on the seat of the car where he could get it instantly. He was ready to fight his way through any ambush they might set.

As it turned out there wasn't any. He got back into town

without trouble, parked by his hotel, and went up to the room.

Just as he'd expected, his luggage had been searched. Whoever it was had done a good professional job. Anyone but a trained detective wouldn't have ever guessed how thoroughly the things had been gone through, but by long habit Mike Shayne always booby-trapped a

bag when he thought it might be looked into. These had.

Since they already appeared to know all about him anyway, it didn't seem to make very much difference how well they searched. Shayne was too old a fox to leave things lying around that he didn't want seen.

He lay down on the bed, fully clothed, and caught another hour of sleep.

When he woke it was after three o'clock in the morning. Outside his open window the town square lay utterly quiet except for the occasional rustle of oak leaves in a vagrant breath of air.

Mike Shayne left his room and went down the back stairs and out the rear door of the hotel. Only then did he sit down on the step and put his shoes on. He could move as quietly as a cat when he wanted to in spite of his size and bulk, and he was sure no one heard him go through the alley in the rear of the building and out to the street. Once there he moved only in the shadows. He neither saw nor heard anyone on the streets.

It was only a short walk to the building that housed the local mortician's burial parlor and work rooms. The lights that had burned earlier in the evening inside the rear rooms were off. There was only a dim

bulb glowing over the front entrance.

Shayne slipped quietly around to the rear of the building. The service door was locked of course, but this was a small town with no reason to anticipate ghouls or body snatchers. Shayne had a ring of pass and skeleton keys as well as lock-picking tools as part of the regular equipment of his trade.

He had the door open inside of five minutes and without making any noise. He had to chance there being a burglar alarm. There wasn't any.

Mike Shayne had never been inside this particular building, but he'd looked it over carefully from the outside and besides that had a pretty good idea of how it ought to be layed out. The workroom where bodies would be prepared for burial should be in the rear wing and the parlors up front next to the street.

He found the room he was looking for without any trouble. The door wasn't even locked. Shayne turned the knob carefully, pushed the door open, and stepped inside.

It was a big room, at least fourteen by thirty feet. There were cabinets and shelves of instruments for the preparation of bodies. They sent a chill up the big detective's spine. At the

end of the room was a long, metal, porcelain topped operating table.

Shayne didn't know the technical name for it, but he could see there was a body on top covered over with a sheet. The only light came in through high, skylight windows. He supposed the mortician didn't want anyone looking in to watch him at work. At this time of night it was very dim. Most of the room was in heavy shadow.

Mike Shayne moved towards the sheeted corpse. He walked carefully to avoid falling or knocking over a table or cabinet. His feet made almost no sound on the bare wooden floor.

"Come on in," a voice said. "I've been expecting you."

Mike Shayne was a man of cool nerves, able to face any sort of danger and keep his head.

The loud, jeering voice in that dark and eerie room made him jump. He came down flailing his arms, trying to reach his gun, fighting wildly for control. One foot stood firm and the other twisted to run for the door. As a result he almost fell down.

"Don't be so touchy, boss," the loud voice came again. "Ain't nobody here but us

chickens and a couple of dead bodies."

Then there was a roar of laughter.

Mike Shayne recognized the voice. The laughter made his face flame and burn, but he had sense enough to let his right hand fall away from his gun.

Sheriff Dan Henly was sitting in a straight wooden chair back at the far end of the room in the heavy shadows where Mike Shayne had failed to see him. He had a sawed-off double barreled shotgun in his hands. The twin muzzles centered on the city man's midriff.

Mike Shayne stood still while his heart continued its effort to pound an escape hatch through his chest.

"That's right smart," Henly said. "I didn't rightly want to kill you, but if you'd got that gun out I might of had to. Just try to simmer down now. Don't do nothing reckless. Shooting body snatchers is nice and legal all seasons."

"I'm no body snatcher and you know it," Shayne said in what he hoped was his normal voice.

"You know it and I know it," Henly said, "but if I did have to blow your guts out, how would anybody else ever know it? Friend, I got a licence to kill you right now. I just

purely hope you don't make me use it."

"Okay," Shayne said. "I'm on the side of the law myself in case you forgot." He held his hands away from the gun in his belt. "Can I sit down."

"Rather have you standing where I can see you. Just lift that gun out with two fingers and drop it to the floor. Then step clear of it."

Mike Shayne complied.

"Now," Henly said, "you climb on up and sit on the table there. You won't disturb the corpse none. Then we can talk."

Shayne did as he was told. "How come you were waiting here for me?"

"You should figure that," the sheriff said. "We're both lawmen so we think alike. After you wouldn't buy Sally's story, there just wasn't any other place for you to come next. What took you so long?"

"I needed some sleep," Shayne said. "What's wrong with that?"

"It ain't fun sitting here while that stiff snoozes on the slab," Henly said. "That's what's wrong. I knew you'd be along though. You'd have to see if we'd killed the little girl and was fixing to bury her under another name."

"Well, was I right?" Mike Shayne asked.



"If you were right," Dan Henley said, "I'd have put both loads of buckshot in your belly instead of yelling boo at you just now. I'd have had me a dead body snatcher and no more trouble with you. I can still do it, remember."

"Then why stake out this body?" Shayne asked again. He was beginning to think that, in spite of the way the man talked, Sheriff Henly didn't mean to let him get out of the room alive. "Why not just let me come and look and go away again when I saw I'd been wrong?"

"So you figured out I'd need a reason?" Henly said. "You're bright as well as tough, Mr. Shayne. Well, go ahead and see for yourself."

When the detective hesi-

tated, he continued. "Go on. Pull the sheet off the body. Look for yourself. Oh hell—I'll do it for you."

He got up and pulled the sheet back, with a quick movement to expose the body from the waist up.

It certainly wasn't Bonnie Byrne.

The body was that of an old man, and he was very dead indeed. He had been shot twice. One wound was through the breastbone high up on the right side. It was a relatively small wound, probably from a small caliber pistol, and had begun to heal before the man died. .

The second wound was into the belly from the right side, slightly above the navel. The entrance hole was a ragged tear. In spite of the efforts of the mortician, Mike Shayne's experienced eye could tell that there'd been extensive damage to the internal organs and a massive infection had set in. Either the damage or the infection or a combination of both had killed the man. He hadn't been dead much more than a day.

The sheriff put the sheet back so that it covered the body and head.

"That ain't no pretty little girl," he said to Shayne. "That's a raunchy old buck just had his body washed for the first time

in forty years. Had you time to stay for the funeral this afternoon—which you ain't got time for—you'd find out for sure he was Old Pop Minders."

"Why now," Mike Shayne said, "I'm not about to argue with your identification. Actually I don't give a damn if the dear departed is Pop Minders, like you say, or even Santa Claus."

"Sure," Henly agreed. "That's being a practical man. You want to know why you were shown the cadaver. You want to know who shot him and why and where he fits into your job."

"That's just about it," Shayne said.

"So I'm going to level with you," the lawman said. "There's some in town thinks I should just blow your head off, but I say no. I like you, Mr. Shayne, because you're a practical man. Besides if I kill you, Mr. Donald Byrne won't be happy. He'll just send more like you until God alone knows what all will come for it.

"Shayne's a reasonable man, I told them. I'll just level with him and he'll go tell his boss the truth, and then we won't be bothered any more. Was I right?"

"You tell me the truth," the redhead said. "I've always been a reasonable man, and I don't

aim to change my ways at this late date."

He was wondering who the "They" were that Sheriff Henly had argued with.

"The truth is," Henly said gravely, "and I swear to God it is the truth, that Bonnie Byrne shot Old Pop Minders. That's the truth. The innocent little girl you're looking for shot that old man there. She shot him dead."

"Mr. Byrne is going to want proof," Shayne said.

He got down off the table where he'd been perched, and stood facing the sheriff. Shayne's own gun was still on the floor where he'd dropped it. It was near his right foot. The shotgun was no longer aimed at Shayne although it was still cradled in the sheriff's arm.

The sheriff took a gun out of his pocket and passed it over to Shayne. It was a shiny, nickel plated twenty-five caliber automatic pistol. Even in that dim light the fancy finish picked up a sparkle.

"That gun is evidence," Henly said. "You can't take it along. You can copy the serial number if you want. You check and you'll find like we did that it's registered to Bonnie Byrne in Miami. We got the slugs dug out of Pop, and ballistics say they come from that gun. Not

that we need slugs. We got an eye-witness."

"I want to talk to him."

"Her. But you can't talk to nobody but me. That is, unless you talk in open court before my cousin Judge Henly."

"Why would a girl like Bonnie shoot that old man?"

"That's what we couldn't figure for sure," the sheriff said. "You better believe she did though. She run out of gas for that fancy car she drives and walked off the road to Pop's place to get some or have him go for some. I dunno. Anyway Pop was there. He'd been drinking. Hell, man, he's been drinking for forty years to my certain knowledge. Not a speck of harm in Old Pop. I guess he scared her, though, or got mad at her smart talk. Who knows. He scared her or sumpin' and she shot him."

"You say you got a witness?"

"Pop's old woman saw it all from inside the house. She come out and clobbered the girl with her old iron skillet. Then she called for Doc Lutterback—he's married to my sister. Doc called me."

"Is Doc the fat man I saw in your office?" Mike Shayne asked.

"That was his brother Pete. So you see the mess we was all in. There was a murder, and as

soon as she starts to talk we find out our killer was Don Byrne's baby girl."

"Which brings up the sixty-four-dollar question," Shayne said. "Where is Bonnie now? In your jail where she ought to be? Dead? That's what I'm here to find out, if you remember."

"Hold your steam, big man. I'm getting to that. There we are with a dead body and a killer. Only the killer is the biggest problem. If we bring her to trial in this county, she's going to be convicted. No doubt at all. Everybody around here liked Pop, and half of them is his cousins."

"I been noticing that cousin bit," Shayne said.

"Then you know that if she's tried she goes to the chair. So then old pappy Byrne wants to kill everybody who hurt his girl. He can come close to it to. At best we got a war like the Hatfields and the McCoys. At best we got trouble up to our armpits. And for what? None of it's going to bring Pop back, is it? Answer me that?"

"Of course it isn't," Shayne said. "Now get to the point, man. Where is the girl now?"

Dan Henly said the one thing then that Mike Shayne hadn't expected to hear. It rocked the big man right back on his heels.

"We let her go," the sheriff said. "We put gas in her car and

let her drive right out of here. We don't know where she went no more than if she was a jaybird headin' north in Spring."

"My God!" Shayne said.

"Ain't that right, big man. We figured her to go, and take the trouble with her. Save the county the cost of a trial and keep some good men alive. We didn't exactly kiss her good-by but we let her go."

"My God," Mike Shayne said again.

SHERIFF HENLY walked Mike Shayne back to his hotel and up to his room. There was a deputy in a chair already outside the room door.

"You get a couple hours sleep," Sheriff Henly said. "Then we going to follow your car across the county line. Go north or south—we reckon it not at all—but go you will. We been good to you, city man. We told you what you want to know. From here on out you're trouble to us and we're trouble to you."

"I see," Shayne said.

"You mind you do see," Sheriff Dan Henly said with a ring of real sincerity in his voice. "Should you try to stay, I can promise you this. Next time you bat your eyes or break the law, be it only to spit on the sidewalk, you're going to be

killed resisting arrest. You go out of here, man, and you never come back. That or you're dead and we let your body lie where it falls."

"You don't mix words," Shayne said.

"I try not to," the sheriff said. "Sleep well. You're going to need your rest."

Mike Shayne crossed the room after his door closed, and stood looking out the window at the sleeping square. It looked very peaceful in the pre-dawn light. He saw the sheriff come out the front of the hotel and cross the square towards his office in the courthouse.

The big detective looked down at the retreating back.

"That was a good story," he said under his breath. "You should go on the stage. Things would be real nice if only I could believe all that."

He took off his shoes and jacket and stretched out full length on the hotel bed. Again he was surprised at how comfortable it was.

"Why does everybody in this town have to lie to me?" he asked himself. Then he went sound asleep. After a time the deputy in the hall with his chair tipped back against the door could hear the snores coming from inside the room.

It was broad daylight when Mike Shayne woke up again.

Outside a few cars had come into the square and local merchants were beginning to open up their stores for another day of commerce. He heard a straw broom on the brick sidewalk somewhere near.

Shayne shaved and washed. He got a bottle of good brandy out of his luggage and carefully measured three fingers of the amber fluid into the hotel tumbler. He drank it neat and washed it down with cold water from the washstand tap. The warmth of the smoothly fiery spirits felt good in his stomach.

The deputy must have heard him moving, because he knocked on the door. Mike Shayne cracked it open.

"Time to go, city boy," said the man outside with a mean leer on his face.

Shayne knew it was an insult to be called "boy" in this town. He opened the door wider.

The deputy accepted the implied invitation to stick his head in.

It was a mistake.

"Grab your socks," he said. "Don't worry about your breakfast. Have that in the next county if—"

Mike Shayne let the man get that far and then slammed the door on the side of his face. The man gave a startled squawk. He instinctively grabbed for his head and in doing so

dropped the shotgun he'd been holding.

Shayne pulled the door wide open with his right hand at the same time he grabbed the deputy's bruised face with his left and yanked.

The man fell forward into the room. As he did so, Shayne knocked him unconscious with a hard karate chop to the nape of the neck. He was out cold by the time he fell full length on the rug.

Mike Shayne got the shotgun off the hall floor and brought it into the room. He took the deputy's shirt off his back and used strips torn from it to bind and gag him.

"The shirt's for saying boy," he told the unconscious man. "It seems a shame to tear up hotel sheets."

He put the man on top of the bed and tied him there. In case he came to he couldn't reach the floor or any other hard surface to pound on and attract attention.

Then he took his luggage and went down to check out. The same clerk was on duty, and he was half asleep. Shayne paid his bill.

"I won't have time to stop by and say good-by to old Dan Henly," he told the clerk. "If he comes by later you say I'm sorry to have to hurry."

"Sure will," the yawning

clerk said. "Fine feller, Dan."

"I like him," Shayne said. "Oh, by the way, you give him a message from me?"

"Sure I will."

"Just tell him my boss never sends a boy to do a man's job. — Just tell him that for me."

The detective's car was parked where he'd left it.

He drove out of town on the highway headed South—the way he'd come and knew perfectly well that careful eyes behind him were taking note of the direction. His time would be short. Somebody would think to call Dan Henly and tell him the Miami man had been seen driving out of town. Dan would go look for his deputy to see if he'd gone too.

Within minutes after the bound figure was found on the bed the hue and cry would be up. They'd phone ahead and put a posse to block every road going north.

Shayne had no illusions about what would happen to him if that particular peckerwood deputy was with the men who caught up to him.

He wasn't really racing for the county line though. If he had been, he'd have managed somehow to bring the deputy along as a hostage. He just wanted Sheriff Henly to think he was running for his life.

Would the sheriff hold back

and let him go for good riddance as their talk the night before had implied? Shayne had a pretty good educated guess that the answer to that one had to be a no.

Even if Henly wanted to let the detective go, the rest of them would likely veto that idea. Apparently the whole county, or at least the people who ran the county, were all in this thing together. What happened to Mike Shayne wouldn't be entirely up to the sheriff, because somehow or other Shayne posed a threat to a great many people.

He wished he could be sure exactly what that threat was. It would help him plan his next moves—and right then Mike Shayne needed a plan.

Above all he wished he could have believed the sheriff's story in its entirety. Then he could go on trying to track Bonnie Byrne out of the county. He could forget about guns at his back for a while. That would be nice.

He couldn't believe that story though. There were too many holes in it.

"As many holes as a fishnet," he told himself.

Of course some of it was true. He was reasonably sure the gun he had been shown the night before really was registered to Bonnie Byrne. He also believed at least one slug from

the little spitfire weapon had been dug out of Old Pop Minders.

On the other hand there was a glaring discrepancy in the story of the killing.

He was being asked to believe that Bonnie had driven into the county, shot Pop and been allowed to drive on only a few hours later because holding her for trial "wouldn't bring Pop back, would it?" She could have shot the old man—Mike Shayne wouldn't put it past any member of the Byrne family to use a gun—and they could have let her go when they found out who she was. It could have been that way. Except for one thing.

Dan Henly's story put the action all in one day where it had to be compressed to be logical. The trouble with that was that Shayne had seen the old man's body.

He hadn't died the same day he was shot. He'd died of infection and internal damage and taken about ten days to do it. That would be about right as he was to be buried this same day and it was over a week since Bonnie had vanished.

It was still possible that Bonnie had killed the man Shayne had seen on the table. But then why would Dan Henly lie about the time element? He lied because he had to to support his story of letting



Bonnie go. It discredited all the rest of his tale.

"Nobody turned that girl loose to drive away," Shayne told the unheeding pine trees as he drove. "Maybe they killed her and buried her in secret. Maybe old Minders killed her himself. One thing sure is she didn't just get in that fancy car and drive away. Dead or alive she's still here in this county—and that's where I've got to stay if I mean to find her."

The big trouble was he didn't know where he could stay or even where to start looking. This was strictly

enemy territory for Michael Shayne. Everyone's hand was against him including the law. He wished he was back in Miami in the jurisdiction of his longtime good friend Police Chief Will Gentry.

He was driving on the main highway going South. It was a good road and fairly heavily traveled, as was the other road off somewhere to his left that led to Waycross. Even this early in the morning there were cars on the road with out-of-State licence plates, and he was glad to see them.

The possible presence of
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witnesses who weren't under Sheriff Henly's thumb would make it harder for the local people to just shoot him down if he was caught.

Shayne's car needed gas and his stomach needed breakfast. He decided he might risk a quick stop, if he picked a spot where tourists were already congregated. The gas for the car was the most important thing.

He passed farms and a few isolated gas stations, but nothing that suited his purpose. Maybe he'd have to cross the county line anyway and then come back—that is if they let him recross the line.

He was sure none of them wanted him back. Whatever the game was, he'd managed to throw sand in the gears just by showing up. So far they hadn't wanted to kill him because it wouldn't have done them any good. There'd just have been more like him coming along and a killing to try and cover up.

However, he hadn't any illusions. If he got too close to the truth, they'd kill and trust to the sheriff and the judge and the rest of their courthouse crowd to cover up.

Meanwhile Mike Shayne was hungry. His big body had used up a lot of energy and needed fresh calories for fuel.

Sometime between nine and nine-thirty he saw what appeared

ed to be just the place to stop.

It was a long, rambling complex of old and new buildings with a thoroughly modern gas station and car repair facility out front. There was a restaurant and what looked like a combined general store and novelty sales emporium.

The big sign said: "*Pecan Paradise—Get Them Right off the Trees. Service Station—Everything for Man and Car.*" It sounded inviting.

Mike Shayne had his car refilled and checked, parked it in the concrete-surfaced lot and walked over to the shining, spic-and-span restaurant. He'd decided to take a chance and get himself a hot breakfast. Even if somebody recognized him as the man all the ruckus in town was about, which he doubted anyone would, he was a long way from town and headed out of the county. He was going the way they wanted him to, so why should he be bothered?

The food was delicious, plentiful and cheap. Actually Mike Shayne wondered how the proprietor could break even at the prices. Probably had a farm and raised his own eggs, bacon and corn-meal. Give the tourists a break on food and make it back on high priced novelties and gifts or souped-up car

repairs "discovered" as needed by the gas jockeys. Such places weren't unusual along any highroad.

Then he saw the pecan stand again through the window and remembered stories he'd read in the Miami papers. The pecans were there in big twine bags and the price was a nickel a pound. The rotted nuts would be worth more than that as hog feed. These were in prime condition. The setup suddenly stood out to the big detective as a come-on of mammoth proportions. For what? He thought he knew.

Then he remembered something Sally Watters had said the night before.

"I'd better have a look," Mike Shayne told himself. "This place or one like it could be just what I've been seeking."

He went into the souvenir shoppe and bought an expensive ashtray, flashing a roll of bills as he did so. Then he went back to the service station, paid for the gas and oil, and over-tipped the attendant.

There was a bar adjoining the restaurant, and Shayne bought a drink there and acted the bigshot Miami tourist for the barkeep's benefit.

"Where can a man get some action?" he wanted to know.

Within ten minutes he had the answer.

Somebody came and took him to a big old, mostly unpainted frame building sitting in the pines back of the bar and restaurant. It had once been a barn. There were few windows and those had been covered with heavy wooden shutters nailed closed.

There was a room inside walled off from the old stalls and feed storage area. It even boasted a roulette table—though the wheel was covered with a green cloth this early in the day. The dice table was in operation however. A couple of New York tourists and four or five local shills were rolling for moderate stakes.

After a while Mike Shayne got into the game. He bet recklessly, winning or losing with apparent indifference until he was about a hundred dollars in the hole. Everytime he reached into his wallet the detective let the roll of bills he'd drawn for expense money on this job show to anyone who cared to look.

It wasn't long before he knew that the stick man handling the game had him pegged as well heeled and eager for excitement.

Finally Shayne turned away from the table.

"Guess I better hit the road," he said.

"What's the hurry?" one of the local men asked.

"This game is too damn slow," the redhead said. "Why waste my time shooting for peanuts here when I can get some real action up the line in Savannah? Tell me that!"

"You want real action?" the man said.

"I got ten grand I want to double."

"Well then hold on a minute. Don't be in such an all-fired scamperin' rush. Wait right where you are."

The local boy went over and spoke to the stickman. Then he came back to where Shayne waited. "Bob says the boss is up in his office. You want some real lively action, then he'll take you on up to get it."

"Of course I want action."

"Big man," the local said, "you had better mean that. The boss he plays no limit. No limit at all. He don't mess around with small time stuff."

"Neither do I," Mike Shayne said. "Don't waste my valuable time standing around here."

The stickman came over then. He spoke briefly into a wall phone and then led Shayne to the back of the gaming room. There was a door cut into the paneling so it say flush with the wall. It had no knob but the stickman used a key to open it.

They went up a narrow stair to where offices had been built on what had once been the hayloft. The man knocked on the door and opened it to let Shayne walk through. Then he followed and closed the door.

There was a man sitting behind a big mahogany desk. He was a very fat man and he wore a belt buckle set with fire opals.

"GOOD MORNING, Mr. Shayne," the fat man said. "I was hoping it was you."

There was a snub-nosed thirty-eight Police Positive revolver on the desk blotter within an inch of the fingers of his right hand.

Mike Shayne laughed at him. It was a hard laugh, low and deep in the throat. He heard metal scrape cloth as the stickman in back of him drew a hidden gun.

"Maybe you hoped it'd be me," Shayne said. "I was sure you'd be back of the desk."

The fat man, Pete Lutterback, had nerve. He just lifted his eyebrows in query.

"It had to be somebody I'd already met," Shayne said, "and you were the most likely choice." He felt the stickman's gun muzzle against his kidney. By the feel of it another small caliber automatic like Bonnie's.

"You see," Shayne went on

as if talking to a friend on the corner of Flagler Street and Miami Avenue, "I've known the answer to this whole business since last night. Sheriff Henly and Sally Watters told me. Of course they didn't know they told me. I didn't know it either till I got to thinking things over this morning, but I do know it now."

"That's real interesting," Lutterback said. "The only thing is, just what good do you think it's going to be to you now?"

"Why it winds up my job."

"The hell it does," the fat man said. "Take his gun, Bob."

The stickman shifted his gun just a little, and then reached under Shayne's jacket with his left hand, trying to find the big man's gun. He was looking for a holster on the side of the belt. Shayne actually wore his gun riding high in the small of the back behind his right hip.

The big man moved fast, and he knew exactly what he was doing. That gave him the edge.

He spun to his right, twisting his body away from Bob's gun. The stickman was a gambler and not a professional killer. He waited too long and lost the infinitesimal fraction of a second in which he could still have pulled the trigger of his gun.

Mike Shayne's big hand quizzical smile on his face.

closed over hand and gun in a vise-like grip that broke a couple of Bob's small finger bones. At the same instant the redhead bent his knees and bowed his body almost horizontal to the floor. His left hand clamped a grip on the back of the gambler's neck and he pulled, heaved and thrust with shoulders and hips all at one. The stickman flew over Shayne's back.

Lutterback took a startled second to realize what was happening. Then he got his own gun off the blotter and pulled the trigger. He thought he was firing a slug into Shayne's chest, but by that time the chest wasn't any longer in the line of fire.

Instead of shooting the detective, Lutterback put the heavy bullet into the body of his own man.

Then the gambler's body came across the top of the desk into Lutterback's face. The chair went over backwards and the fat man's head hit the wall a stunning crack.

When he came to his senses and scrambled back to his feet—or to a half-standing position supporting himself with both hands resting on the desk top—Mike Shayne had pulled up a chair and was sitting in front of the desk with a

"If I was as lousy with a gun as you are," the big redhead told him, "I'd give up and try something else."

Lutterback stood like a fighting bull that's just taken the sword and shook his head back and forth in a dazed fashion.

The stickman lay on the floor at his feet. Blood was coming out of his mouth and out of a hole in his chest. He was in shock. His eyes were open but blank of expression and the only movement he made was a sort of convulsive scrabbling of the finger tips. The fat man looked at the blood and was suddenly sick to his stomach. He opened his mouth and vomited on his desk and on the wounded man's legs.

Bob didn't seem to care.

"One hell of a killer you are," Shayne said in a jeering, hard voice. "This is twice in two weeks you've shot one of your own men. Don't you think it'll make the rest of them nervous."

Lutterback wiped his mouth on his sleeve. "Oh damn it, shut up." Then he did a double take.

"How did you know? How could you know?"

"I'm a detective," Mike Shayne said, "not one of your lousy redneck deputies. I can add two and two and come up with a nice round four."



"Bob needs a doctor," Lutterback said.

As if to comment the stickman opened his mouth and a great gush of blood came out on the floor. The body jerked convulsively and then was still.

"He needs a coffin," Mike Shayne said. "He's dead."

The fat man blinked his eyes and paled.

"They can only hang you once," Shayne said in a tone that was deliberately brutal. He wanted to keep Lutterback dazed and confused so the big man would talk.

"That ought to be a comfort. You just hang once. For Old Pop Minders or this Bob, what difference does it make to you? You can stop worrying over thst."

"You're crazy." Lutterback was fighting for control.

"I'm a detective," Shayne said. "I told you that once."

Don't make me repeat myself. The sheriff had to show me Minders' corpse. He was smart enough to know I'd demand an autopsy, if he didn't. An autopsy would have brought out the truth."

He waited, but Lutterback stood silent.

"An autopsy," Shayne said, "would give legal evidence that Bonnie Byrne didn't kill him. Oh, he was shot by her gun in the breastbone. That didn't kill him. He was hit in the belly with a much more powerful gun—for a guess I'd say the thirty-eight you killed Bob with."

Lutterback just blinked his eyes.

"Just like Dan Henly said, old Pop had friends and cousins. An autopsy would lead to you in time. There'd have to be a trial. It would be a lot better if everybody thought the strange girl killed Pop. I suppose there was some sort of cuffle and her gun went off. Then you lost your head—again—and fired at her and hit Pop by mistake. That's it, isn't it?"

"How the hell would you figure that out?" the fat man was scared.

"Easy enough. Your pal ally knew Bonnie was a compulsive gambler. How could she know that if Bonnie hadn't done some gambling in

this area? It wasn't at Sally's place because that isn't open daytimes through the week for gambling. I had to find where.

"When I saw your signs I remembered these pecan stands are sometimes used as a front for a crooked dice game. I made up my mind to check them all, and luck was with me. Yours was the one where Bonnie got in the game. I'd have found you sooner or later anyhow. When I walked in this office and found you waiting with a cannon on the desk, I knew for sure it was you."

"You're real smart, ain't you?"

"I'll do till a better man comes down the pike," Mike Shayne said.

"You're forgetting something."

"I'm forgetting nothing."

"Oh yes you are. You ain't so all-fired smart," Lutterback said. "You got everything all figured out nice and neat. All tied up in a package with fancy wrapping like a Christmas gift. That's what you think? You know all about who killed who and the rest of it."

"You're repeating yourself," Shayne said. He took one of the fat man's cigars out of a box on the desk and lit it. "Come on. We got things to do."

"Ain't you forgetting?" Lutterback was almost yelling

by now. "Ain't you forgetting, you big slob? You got it all but the one thing you got to have. You ain't got that damn girl yet!"

FOR THE first time Pete Lutterback took his hands off the top of the desk and stood erect. He actually tried to smile. But it was a pretty sickly effort on his part.

"You haven't got the girl," he said, "So you ain't really got nothing at all."

Mike Shayne kept any expression out of his face. "You want me to trade your neck for little Bonnie?" he asked in deceptively mild tones.

"I don't mean that," Lutterback said. "We trade nothing. You go on out of this county just like you started. You leave me to clean up the mess."

"Or what?" Shayne asked. "Or you kill the girl? Of course I know she's still alive, or you'd have nothing at all to use as a threat to make me go. I suppose the Henlys wouldn't let you kill her in the first place? That sort of cold-blooded killing of a woman would be too strong for a sheriff and a judge."

"You leave me clean," Lutterback tried, "and we'll let the girl go. We'll send her out of here."

"Oh," Mike Shayne said, "did you actually think I'd fall

for that. You'll let her go anyway."

"You'll never find her."

"I already know where she is," Mike Shayne said. "At least I know where she's got to be. That's why I said let's go."

"Go where?"

"I'm driving you back to town, or at least far enough that we meet the sheriff coming up this way to see if I crossed the county line."

Lutterback looked stunned again.

He and Shayne went down the stairs and out the rear door of the gambling barn. Shayne made him walk around to the restaurant and put in two phone calls. The first was to Miami. Then the operator connected the redhead with the mobile phone in Sheriff Henly's car.

"I'm at Lutterback's place," Shayne said. "Fatso's, that is. I know all there is to know. You better come by and pick him up."

"I'm not far behind you," Henly said. "I'll be there in about ten minutes. Just sit tight."

Lutterback was out of his depth by now. He didn't dare make a break while Shayne was armed, but he couldn't realize how bad it was for him.

"I think you've gone insane," he said to Shayne. "Dan

Henly will gun you down for sure."

"If he'd caught me an hour ago on a back road he might have," Shayne said. "Here with all these out-state people watching, he'll arrest you instead. Then he'll take me to your brother, the doctor's place. I suppose we'll find Bonnie Byrne under sedation. First you'd hold her to see if Pop Minders died. Then after I showed up it would be till you saw if you could get rid of me and made up your minds what to do about me finally."

That was it.

Sheriff Henly drove up shortly. He put Lutterback in the custody of a deputy and drove Shayne over to the private hospital Doctor Lutterback operated.

"Now that it's over," Henly said, "I'm almost glad you came along. Pete and Doc wanted to do what you first suspected—kill the girl and shove her in the wamp. I couldn't let them do it. After we found out who she was even they saw that. On the other hand we didn't dare let her go and talk. This potato was too hot to hold or drop, either me."

"What happens now?" the edhead asked.

"Oh, as far as she's concern-

ed, you can take her out of here. Doc will swear she was injured in an accident—concussion I guess—and he was just treating her. Maybe you can make Byrne go along with that."

"He will. He doesn't want publicity on this any more than the rest of you."

"Old Fatso swings a big stick here. He may get off with manslaughter, Henly said. "I hope not—but that's small county politics. It's been a pleasure to meet you in spite of everything, Shayne."

They rode in silence for a few minutes. Shayne knew, though, that Henly would soon ask questions.

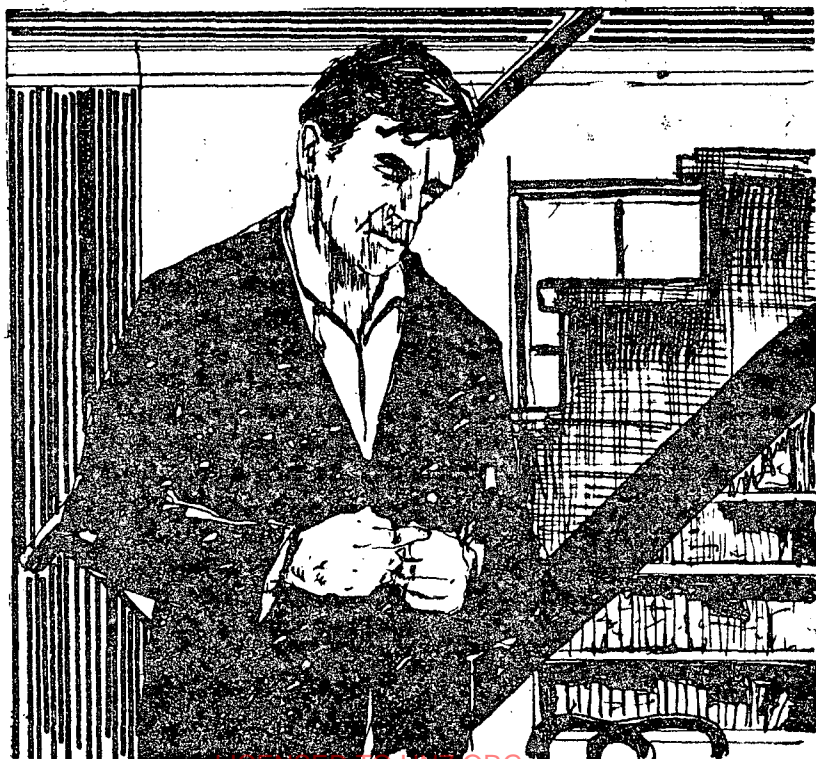
Then the sheriff said: "Only a couple of things puzzle me. How did you stay sure all along that the girl was alive—and that I wasn't going to just kill you out of hand?"

Mike Shayne laughed. "You told me both those things the time you said you and I are both lawmen and that we think like lawmen. Cold-blooded murder isn't in either of us. Whatever was going on, it was obvious you were in it, and I couldn't see you killing the girl."

Sheriff Dan Henly said: "Thanks."

An Exciting Story of Justice

He had been one of filmland's immortals, every man's envy, every woman's heart throb. That is, he had been. Now he was a very dead old man—and I had four hours to find his killer.



FADE OUT-FADE IN

by ED LACY



AS THE HARBOR has a three-man police force, I usually come on at ten and work straight through until about seven or eight at night, when parking and traffic is pretty heavy.

This morning I was up very early, because low tide was due at four forty-five and I was out in my boat, trying to get a couple bushels of clams.

My salary is low, so, like most Harbor men, I do some clamming whenever I can.

I was one hundred yards out from the beach, working the long, scissor-like digging poles, doing real good, when a car stopped on the beach, headlights flashing on and off. Then the siren sounded, once, and I got up anchor and rowed in.

Jack Harris, our night shift officer, was waiting. The words

almost burst from his mouth: "Chief, a guy was murdered at the motel! *Roy Burns!*"

I felt like I'd been kicked in the stomach. The Harbor's a 1049 population village in fall and winter, with maybe two thousand summer tourists. We've never had a major crime, much less a murder: all my police work has been petty thefts, running in drunks, ticketing speeders. Jack's fleshy face had a troubled look and then I got it.

"You mean Roy Burns the movie star?" I asked.

"That's right, Dave. Funny, they were showing one of his old pictures on TV last night. My wife couldn't get our kid to bed because of that and—"

"Yeah, I saw part of it, myself," I said, tossing the anchor on the beach and getting

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into our one police car with Jack.

I told him to drive me home. I was sick. Any murder was bad enough, but for a famous movie star to be killed meant lots of lousy publicity for the Harbor. Nor could I help but think of the spot I was in—the eyes of the country, the world would be on our little police force.

Changing into my uniform, I shook my ten-year-old boy awake, told him to take care of the rowboat and the clams I'd dug before he went to school.

Then we drove to the motel, with Jack giving me a fast rundown. "Crazy killing, Dave. Somebody entered through the window and beat him to death.

"Wasn't robbery; Burns had two hundred and fifty bucks in his wallet, plus a couple of big rings and an expensive watch. He checked in after nine last night as R. Burns. Charlie Owens says he had no idea he was the famous actor. He don't look nothing like his movies, he's a little old man now. Of course all those movies on TV were made about twenty-five years ago.

"Anyway, it seems Burns was on his way to Montauk when his car conked out, so he had to spend the night at the motel. He told Charlie that and I've checked with Herman at the gas station. The car's still

there with a busted carburetor valve."

Jack glanced at me in the windshield mirror. "Dave, I already called County Homicide. I mean, what the hell, that's the law."

"Sure. You did the right thing, Jack."

I knew exactly what Jack meant. County would want to take over, claiming this was too big for a hick police force.

Doc Mansfield, who doubled as the Harbor's coroner, a state trooper and the County Homicide man were at the motel when we got there. Homicide said, "Hi, Chief. This was the blunt instrument." He held up a small hunk of pipe. "Killer wore gloves. No prints. I'll take this back to our lab. I guess you'll need our help on this, so—"

"It's my case. If I need help I'll let County know," I grunted, staring at the battered body of this little old man. The pillow was all bloody.

Doc said, "Horrible, Dave, just horrible. He was struck again and again after he was dead. Seems the work of a maniac. Pending an autopsy, I'd place the time of death at about two-thirty in the morning.

I nodded. I didn't have my notebook with me, wrote the death time down on the back of a book of parking tickets. The

county man took me aside. Now listen, Chief, this is going to be a headline case. You'd best let us take it over."

"I'll handle my own work. However I'd appreciate it if you'd dust the room. Our fingerprint outfit isn't much. And I could use one of your photographers."

"Sure, we'll cooperate, but it would be best if we took the case. Make things easier if we—"

"No, I'm in charge."

Charlie Owens, who often went chumming for blues with me, came in. "What a mess, sheets and whole bed ruined. This will about kill what little business I do off-season."

"Forget business, Charlie. This is a murder." For the first time I noticed that, except for the bloody bed, the rest of the motel room was in order. What time did he check in?"

"At nine-thirty-five last night. He said his car had broken down. I had no idea he was the Roy Burns. Think of this, Dave—I was watching one of his old pictures on TV when he registered. In fact, he watched it himself for a moment. I keep an old TV set in the office and he never said a word about it being him there on the screen. Of course the fellow we were watching was young and trim and—"

"Who discovered the body, Charlie?"

"Me. I always get up early and I noticed the window wide open, the curtains blowing. Well, it was a mite too cold last night for a wide open window, so I looked in and—Dave, I got sick."

"Charlie, think carefully. When Burns checked in last night, did he seem nervous, afraid?"

"Not a bit. He made a call to Montauk, in the office, explaining to somebody how he wouldn't be out until morning. They must have offered to drive in for him because I overheard him say, 'Thanks, but I might as well stay here, pick up my car in the morning.'"

"Then he asked where he could get something to eat and I told him the diner was the only place in the Harbor, told him to walk down Main Street, couldn't miss it. I heard him return at about ten-thirty. The commercial was on. Burns went to his bungalow."

"Anybody else register last night?"

"Not a soul. I had some fishermen over the weekend, but nobody since, except Burns. I was watching TV until midnight, so he didn't have any visitors up until then."

Now Doc Mansfield asked if he could take the body to Ralph's

undertaking parlor, to perform the autopsy. The County Homicide man, who looked disgusted, said it was okay. I told Jack to stay there, asked the Homicide man to let me know if he came up with any prints.



Driving over to the cottage, which is the phone company building, I asked Mary Grupp to check on that Montauk call. She said, "With this new automatic dialing stuff, it will take time. Dave, is it true about Roy Burns being killed here in the Harbor last night? It was on the radio."

"It's true. It's damn important I get that Montauk number, Mary. Call me the second you have it."

"Imagine him being in the Harbor! I once saw Cary Grant on a street in New York City. I nearly passed out. What does Roy look like?"

"A couple pounds of hamburger, right now."

When I reached my office in the old building that's a combination city hall, police station, fire house and post office, Buster Gaines, who doesn't report until six, was waiting, along with Hank Sims, the supermarket cashier who also works as a special cop on Sundays. I was glad to see my men on the ball, but they started throwing questions at

me. I sent Hank home, told Buster to start the morning patrol of Main Street. It wasn't eight but my phone began ringing, a reporter from Hollywood calling.

I told him, "The Harbor police force is working on the case. No other comment." I no sooner put the phone down than a New York City paper called.

From the window I could see Hank gassing with Fred Holmes, the carpenter. I went to the door and yelled for Hank to come back, take care of the phone. It would be ringing all morning, plus reporters and photographers descending on the Harbor soon.

It was almost comical to hear Hank's self-important tone as he said, "All we can tell you is that the Harbor police are working on the case. Sure, call later, if you want. We expect a break soon."

But I was hardly in a comical mood as I sat at my desk, wondered how to start on this murder. At eight Larry Haff, the druggist and mayor of the

Harbor, dropped in. "How's it coming, Dave?"

"I'm working on it."

Larry rubbed his bald head. "Dave, can you handle this? You know what I mean."

"Hell, Larry, this isn't a movie. A murder isn't solved in an hour!"

"Dave, Dave, don't get riled. For my money you're the best police chief we've ever had. What I meant was—well, I run a good drugstore but now and then I get a call for some unusual medicine and I have to end to Riverside for it. No reflection on me; I'm not opposed to carry every medicine on the market. The thing is, the Harbor is going to get a lot of bad publicity and it will be worse if our police don't solve this."

"Larry, if I'm in over my head, I'll call County detectives."

"Fine. That's all I wanted to know. I have confidence in you, Dave."

When he left I sat there, Hank busy answering the phone. I wondered if I wasn't acting like a horse's end. I'd never been near a murder before and Roy Burns had been a big Hollywood star for years and years, how could I possibly now who his enemies were?

To solve a killing you need some link between the killer

and the victim and such a link could be in Hollywood, New York, Paris, any place. How could I—?

A Jag roadster stopped in front of my office and a tall man with brushed gray hair got out, wearing expensive slacks and a suede windbreaker. Striding into the office he asked. "Who's in charge here?"

"I am. I'm the Police Chief." My words had a hollow sound.

"My name is Harrison Parks. I just heard the terrible news on the radio. I have a place at Montauk. Roy was coming out there to spend a few days with me."

It was my day for VIPs. Parks was one of the high society guys who'd bought estates all over this end of the Island since the war, a big man on Wall Street and all the rest.

Hank called from across the room, "Dave, Mary has the number Burns phoned last night!"

"Okay, put it down and thank her." I glanced up at Parks. "I guess that's you."

"Correct. Roy phoned that his car had broken down. I wanted to drive in, pick him up, but he said he'd wait until morning, for his car. How I wish I had insisted on coming in for him!"

"Sit down, Mr. Parks. Who was at your house last night?"

"My wife, myself and the servants, of course."

"Had you known Mr. Burns long?"

"Oh yes, we are—were—old friends. I once financed a movie company of his, back in 1937."

"Do you know if he had any enemies?"

Parks flashed white teeth in a grin. "In the old days Roy had plenty of enemies. I don't mean people who'd want to murder him, but you understand how it is in the movie business. You don't reach the top without stepping on somebody's back. But Roy hadn't been in pictures for years."

"Was he married?"

"Four or five times. His last marriage was in 1950 and only lasted a couple of years."

"Any children?"

"No."

"Any girl friends?"

The flashy grin again. "I doubt it. Roy was over sixty-three."

"Was Burns well off?"

"Indeed. Roy hadn't been in pictures since '55. He appeared in a Broadway play in 1957. It was a flop and he gave up acting. For the past ten years Roy lived abroad. Oddly enough, he was making more money now than at the height of his fame. Fortunately he owned many of his old movies and sold them to TV for a

bundle — capital gains, you know. He also had interests in a plane company, real estate in California and a fine portfolio of solid stocks, which I handled.

"He flew in from Nice a week ago, to see about selling a parcel of Los Angeles land. He took in the Broadway plays, was to spend a few days with us before heading west. Chief, Roy was my friend and if there's anything I can do, if you need private detectives to help you, why—"

"I don't need any private badges. Mr. Parks, are you going back to Montauk now?"

"Yes."

"All your servants still there, today?"

"Of course. I don't—What are you driving at, officer?"

"Nothing. I may drive out later for some routine questioning. Far as we know now, no one knew Burns was coming here, except you, your wife and your help. I may want to talk to them."

"This is sheer nonsense! Are you implying that—"

"Mr. Parks, I'm not implying anything. I have to follow any and all leads I have. I only said I may drive out."

Parks left in a huff and my nerves were really on edge. A Harbor police job isn't civil service nor does it carry a

pension. While I was positive the town council would back me every step of the way—after all my folks had lived here for generations and we Harbor people stuck together—still a rich joker like Parks could put on a lot of pressure.

Telling Hank to stay on the phone, I crossed Main Street to the diner for coffee. Steve Paulous was busy serving breakfasts. The coffee helped my headache and when I got Steve aside he said, "Dave, isn't this something, a big time actor in my diner and I never even knew it."

"Steve, when Burns came in last night, who else was in here?"

"Nobody. I was getting ready to close and there was nobody except some local kids having sodas. Burns ordered a hamburger, I remember he said no butter on the bread or any onions, then he asked for a beer. He took orange juice when I explained I don't have a beer license."

"Are you sure nobody else came in then, or right after Burns left?"

"No, Dave. When Burns left I herded the kids out and locked the door, started cleaning up. Why?"

"Nothing. Routine police work."

"A rough one, hey, Dave?"

I tried to smile. "A little rougher than that fifteen pound blue you landed last year."

"You'll get the killer, Dave, I know you will. I'm sure."

I thought: "I wish to hell I was as sure!" as I finished my coffee and walked out.

The County man was waiting in my office. Hank said, "My God, Dave, we've been getting calls from Chicago, Hollywood and—Oh, that pest, Mrs. Jensen called. Her damn poodle is lost again."

I sat at my desk and County lit a cigar, told me, "No prints except Burns' and the motel owner's. The killer came through the window while Burns was asleep, probably, beat him and left by the window. The ground's too hard for any footprints. Chief, you'll need plenty of men for this. Let us take the case."

"I told you I'd call if I need help."

He was a burly man in his fifties. Over cigar smoke he said, "Look, Chief, I'm not telling you your business, but the first few hours after a crime are the most important, can't be wasted. This is a big league killing and—"

"And I'm a small town cop?" I cut in.

He blew out a cloud of smoke. "Okay. You said it, I didn't. Face facts. Like I put in



fifteen years on the New York City Homicide Bureau, I've had a lot more experience in murder than you. That's a fact. Nothing personal, merely a fact. The rest of the county squad are big city detectives who retired to the country, started working for the County. A three-man police force can find a lost poodle, but solving a killing requires plenty of men, fast action."

"Any slides go with this lecture?"

"Chief, don't get on your high horse, I'm only trying to help, point up a few facts. For example, we have a communications section which can contact police headquarters in a dozen cities at the same time."

"I haven't been on the case for more than two hours. You solve all your murders within a few hours?"

"Okay, okay. But by noon the Harbor will be full of reporters. Don't make a fool of yourself."

"I'll try not to."

He shrugged his beefy shoulders and left. For a second the office was quiet. Hank said, "Dave, maybe we should call in County? This is big, very big."

"So everybody has been telling me! This is our case and I want a crack at solving it. You want to call in people, get on the radio and tell Buster I want him. And Jack, too."

"Whatever you say, Dave."

I sat at my desk, trying to think, watching Main Street come awake, kids on their way to school, wives doing their shopping. I knew them all by their first names. Small town stuff.

When Jack and Buster were in the office I told Hank to take the receiver off the phone. Then I said, "I've set a deadline. If we can't come up with any clue, a link of some kind, by noon, I'll let County take over. That gives us about three hours. Now, the way I figure, we've got one thing going for us that County doesn't have: we *are* small town cops! Not even a town, merely village cops. Okay.

"About the case, I see it like this: unless it was the work of a passing nut, and the odds are against that. Whoever killed Burns was a man or woman who must have hated his guts a long time. Burns hadn't been in movies for years, or even in the U.S., so somebody suddenly saw him, remembered an old score, killed him."

"You think he was followed out here, from New York City?" Jack asked.

"Possibly, but I doubt it. First, Burns spent a week in New York, so the killer could have knocked him off there. As for following him to the

Harbor, the killer had no way of knowing the car would break down or that Burns would spend the night at Charlie's motel."

"Unless he fixed the car to break down?" Hank said.

"Stop it. Then he, or she, would have loosened a steering nut, made it a fatal accident. Another thing, if Burns was being followed, the roads coming out here are lonely at night. The killer could have easily forced Burns' car off the road and murdered him. If the car and corpse had been left in the pines, it might be days, all winter, before it was found. Look, you're not getting our angle: *we're village cops!*"

"Sure, but what's so special about that, Dave?" Jack asked.

"It means we know everybody in the Harbor! It also means we know that no Harbor person was ever connected with the movies or with Burns. I want you and Buster to start asking around, find any newcomers to the village. Like anybody who's only been here for a few days, a week, even a month. In short, somebody we don't know."

Hank said, "Dave, we'd hear about an outsider. I'd see him at the supermarket—ain't no place else for him to buy food. And you know the village gossip. Soon as there's a guest at

anybody's house; you hear about it. It's different in the summer, with all the tourists coming and going. But now, only strangers in the Harbor would be the weekend fishermen and they leave Sunday night."

"Let's give the idea more thought," I said. "Somebody here in the Harbor did murder Burns. Maybe there's a relative visiting one of the truck farms out in the country, maybe on a farm where nobody comes into the village to shop more than once a week."

"The gossip would still have it," Hank said. "Mom Barry has newcomers at her house, two more grandchildren. The way her daughters have kids, you'd—"

"Damnit, cut the clowning, Hank!" I growled. "Let's take the stores, one by one. Have they hired any new help?"

"Hiring?" Jack said. "In the fall they lay off people. And if they had jobs, they'd give it to a Harbor person. The marina's shut, so no new yachts or cruisers in. I—"

"Wait up," Buster said. "Steve hired a dishwasher last week. Some old rummy who came in for a handout. You know how he hires these vags, nobody in the Harbor wanting the job."

"An old rummy?" I said.

sitting up straight. "Burns was an old man and Burns was in the diner last night; maybe we have a link! Buster, bring him in. No rough stuff, I only want to talk to him. And don't mention Burns to him."

Some ten minutes later Buster brought in this wiry little man with shaggy gray hair and the red eyes of a wino. He was wearing worn seersucker pants and a torn work shirt, but they were clean. The old man didn't act frightened, in fact he sort of held himself with dignity.

He said his name was Fred Wilson, asked firmly, "What is this? Are you out to railroad any stranger in town because there's been a killing?"

"Sit down, Mr. Wilson. Nobody is railroading you." Something about him tickled my weary mind. If his clothes were clean, his big face was dirty, in need of a shave. "We merely want to ask a few routine questions. Like, where were you working before you came here?"

"Odd jobs, sir. I tried picking spuds out at the Denson place, but it was too much for a man of my years. Let's see: in June I was washing dishes at a bar outside Riverside. Forget the name, but it's painted a gaudy pink. A bar is the wrong place for me to work. They

sacked me for taking a bottle. Then I got a job in a Bay City stool joint, washing dishes. That closed Labor Day. I worked with a carny outfit for a few weeks, but they folded for the season. Then I bummed my way here."

"Why here, Mr. Wilson? Why didn't you head for New York? More jobs there?"

He smiled, showing a few stumpy teeth. "Quite true, but there are also hordes of job seekers and fewer openings for an old man."

I studied him for a moment, wondering what there was about him which vaguely bothered me. "Ever been arrested?" I asked innocently.

"Ah, the standard police question. I have, sir, more times than I can count. But always for being a vag or being crooked. The bottle is my sole comfort in old age. A hollow crutch, I must say."

"I'm going to take your prints, send them to—"

Wilson jumped to his feet. "Sir, I know my rights!" he thundered. "You can not fingerprint me without my consent, unless I'm charged with a felony, or suspected of a crime!"

"Maybe we suspect you of stealing a poodle. Are you afraid of being printed?" I asked, my ears ringing.

"Indeed not, sir. It is not fear but a matter of principle. I have read the recent Supreme Court decisions, know you can not—"

I held up my hand; I knew what had been tickling my mind. "Mr. Wilson, you speak very well, project your voice. Were you ever an actor?"

He threw back his head and laughed. "Look at me. Do I look like an actor, sir?"

"I'll ask the questions. Were you an actor?"

The red eyes stared at me boldly. Then he sat down quietly, pulling at a nonexistent crease in his worn pants. "All right, an end to this shabby farce. There's no point in my running, not at my age. I was an actor, one of the best, sir!"

"You see the filthy shell of an old man before you; I do not blame you for failing to recognize me. Neither did Roy. That's what drove me out of my mind. There sat the wealthy and famous Roy Burns, in a diner because it was the sole eating place in town. And there I was, hands in dish water, clothes a shambles. Roy glanced at me and didn't even remember me! It was too much!"

"You mean you were in pictures with Burns?" I asked.

He nodded. "It must be difficult to believe, seeing me now, but once I was fair of

face, groomed for stardom. You saw me on the telly last night. In the movie I was Roy's buddy; we were the two small time punks recruited by the syndicate to—"

"I saw that. Burns' pal was an over-handsome guy . . .

You?" Hank cut in as I glared at him.

Wilson turned his gaunt face in profile, smiling sadly. "The nose has been broken in several brawls, my eyes no longer blue, the hair has lost its golden tint. Yes, I was over-handsome, as you so quaintly stated. That was over thirty-five years ago, another lifetime. Last night's pix was the first Roy and I did together, one of the first of the wretched gangster cycle.

"My role was larger than Roy's; it was supposed to be the leap up the ladder of fame for me. Fate played a miserable trick on Fred Wilson. The tremendous b.o. success of the pix triggered the string of movies about tough hoods and I was too handsome. Extra bits and finally oblivion for Fred Wilson. Roy made many gangster movies, went on to fame and fortune. All of which should have been mine, sir! I was to become the star, not Roy!" His booming voice filled our office again.

"And you, blamed Roy Burns?" I asked.



"I blame no one but the fickle finger of Fate. I was the rising movie actor in those days, with several feature roles to my credit.

"Roy was merely a Broadway chorus boy in his first movie role. On seeing the rushes, they rewrote his part, both our parts, enlarged them. Fate smiled on Roy and goosed me into failure. Frankly, sir, I had accepted my lot, turned to the bottle for solace and became a bum. But once they

started showing Roy's old pictures on the telly, it was a bitter pill to see myself again, young and handsome, a good actor, then watching my roles reduced to mere walk-on bits, my career fading.

"Even bitter as that was, I could take it, but last night—it was as if the devil had set me up for the final kick in the face! On the telly was this first picture we'd made, the largest role I'd ever had, the pix which was to make me a star. Well, it came up for Roy. As a topper, there was Roy himself at the counter, looking great for a man our age in his good clothes. It was a pill too bitter to swallow."

The office was blanketed with silence as the powerful voice died.

"Did you speak to Mr. Burns in the diner?" I asked.

"What for? To show him I was a dish washer? No sir, I did the only thing I can do well these days; I got stoned."

I said, "But you did go to the motel, later. Did Burns refuse you a handout?"

"Oh yes, I went to the motel, later, when I was able to walk." The thin shoulders squared. "A handout? You are quite right, sir, the tragedy is that I had no pride left, that I did go there for a handout. Oh, I'm certain Roy would have

given me money, showed me pity. He could afford to be generous and he always was a decent sort.

"I tapped on the window, too ashamed to knock on the door. He didn't awaken.

"I opened the window and then, like a spotlight, the moonlight showed his fancy bag with the foreign labels on it, the expensive clothes on a chair. I saw Roy Burns sleeping without a care in the world. As the corny line goes, 'There, but for the grace of God . . .' Instead, I was a wino, so high I still had my rubber gloves on, the ones I use while washing dishes. Gloves of my shame.

"Yes, there was Roy sleeping in my bed, so to speak, while I stood in rags, asking for a handout. I lost my head, entered the room and struck out in a blind rage. It wasn't Roy I was wacking, but that lousy harlot, Fate, who'd rooked me!"

There was another heavy silence in the office. I broke it with: "Where did you get the lead pipe from, Mr. Wilson?"

"I had it in my back pocket."

I nodded. That made it premeditated murder—maybe.

"I've carried that old pipe for years. In this sick world, an old man like myself is always being rolled and attacked by

these young punks. Well, what now?"

The voice was projected again, hit me like a blow. "Mr. Wilson, I want you to understand your rights. You have confessed to murder, before three witnesses."

"Of course." He brushed his wild hair with long fingers. "I felt sorry for what I'd done to Roy, although he had a good life. As for me, what's the difference if I end up as a rummy or in a blaze of bad publicity, my failure exposed to the public? It no longer matters, to me. Now, I am exhausted, murder lies heavy on the mind, as Macbeth probably said. Sir, can I lie down?"

Motioning for Jack to take him to our one cell, I said, "Mr. Wilson, I'd like you to dictate a confession, what you've just told us, and sign it. However, it's my duty to also tell you that you don't have to. That's your right."

"I shall dictate it and sign it, sir. I have nothing left to hide. Who knows, perhaps the public may even understand my frustration. I say, I am frightfully bushed. Can I have a beer, perhaps?"

"I'll get you coffee now, have lunch and a beer ready by the time you sign the confession. Buster, go next door and get Anna, the steno, from the

mayor's office. Meantime, Mr. Wilson, you can rest in a cell. Reporters and photographers will undoubtedly be here shortly. But if you don't wish to see them, that's also your right."

He gave me a small bow. "I shall rest, dine and be ready to see the press. Sir, could I borrow a clean shirt and tie? You see, the ham within me isn't completely dead."

"Sure."

When Jack had taken Wilson away, Hank was staring at me with his big mouth opened like a hooked fish. I said, "Okay, Hank. Put the receiver back and stop gawking at me. Then go out to the motel, keep that room locked, don't let any reporters or photographers in. You understand?"

"You bet, Dave—Chief."

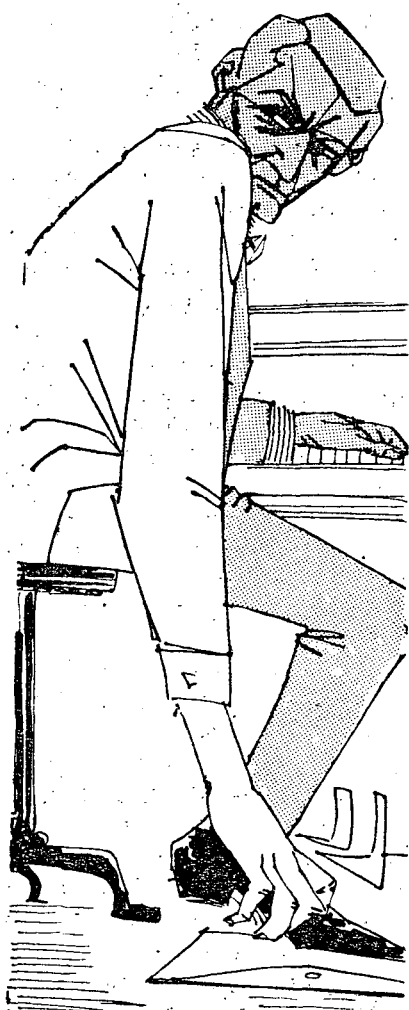
Hank dashed out and for a moment I was alone in the office. The phone rang. I answered it on the third ring. It was the County D.A. He snapped, "Now see here, Dave, I insist that you let us handle this investigation! This isn't the time for petty politics or—"

"What investigation?" I asked, saying the word slowly—and how sweet it tasted! "I have the killer in a cell, and it took me about four hours to solve the murder. Not too bad for a hick cop is it?"

JACK, JACK, WHERE YOU AT?

BY
ARNOLD MARMOR

Somewhere in that mouldy trunk lay the answer to a famous murder. Had he found the real killer—too late?



KENT BAILEY, the noted criminologist, was expecting the trunk to arrive when he had a visitor. The man standing in the doorway was white-haired, wrinkled, and ageless. But his body was wiry and there was strength in his voice. "Mr. Bailey—Mr. Kent Bailey?"

"Yes. I'm Bailey."

"Mr. Bailey, I am Lord Hornsby."

Kent Bailey's mouth gaped. "But you couldn't be— Please come in, sir."

Lord Hornsby entered the house and found himself in a spacious front room, warm from the roaring fire in the fireplace.

Bailey asked Hornsby to be seated, then filled two glasses from a decanter.

Lord Hornsby accepted the port gratefully. His bones were chilled from the winter day.

Kent Bailey sat down in an armchair and gazed with wonder at his visitor.

"Are you *the* Lord Hornsby? The inspector in charge of the Jack the Ripper case?"

"I *was* in charge," Lord Hornsby admitted. "That was so many years ago. There were times when I was close . . . close. But I never caught Jack the Ripper."

"I think I know why you're here," Kent Bailey said.

"Yes," the old man said. "The trunk from Australia."

Kent Bailey couldn't hide the excitement in his voice. "I was sure Jack the Ripper had a brother. It was all conjecture, of course, but I spent five years tracking down every lead till I came across the name of William Bellows. I went to Australia to find him but he was dead. He had died while I was still on the ocean.

"It had been a shock when I had found that Bellows was alive so it came as no surprise to find that he had died while I was traveling to Australia. I did find a son who refused to talk to me. Then he promised to send me his father's papers when he himself died."

"And now the trunk is on the way," Lord Hornsby said.



"I knew you were interested in the Ripper, so I surmised the trunk had been sent to you. I also wanted to go through the papers that belonged to Jack the Ripper's brother."

"Then you're convinced, as I am, that Bellows was indeed the Ripper's brother?"

Lord Hornsby nodded his head emphatically.

"I suspected it for some time. I knew he would never divulge his brother's name. But I must find out for my own satisfaction."

"But now we know that the Ripper's last name was Bellows," Kent Bailey emphasized.

"No, no," Lord Hornsby said. "The Ripper's brother went to Australia to escape the stigma of what his brother was doing. There he changed his name to Bellows."

"What was his real name?"

"I don't know," Lord Hornsby said. "I believe the answer will be in the brother's papers."

"The piece of the puzzle that is missing," Kent Bailey said.

"When we know who the Ripper is then the case will be closed," Lord Hornsby said: "I will confront him—"

"What?" Bailey interjected. "You think the Ripper is still alive?"

"Yes."

"After all these years? It's impossible."

"Still alive," Lord Hornsby insisted. "And still active."

There was disbelief in Kent Bailey's voice. "I just can't believe it"

"The Ripper was very young when he started his rampage. I was always convinced of that. Young and agile. The way he always eluded my men. And now, when the urge to kill is there, he strokes out, with that same bloody knife of his."

"And the proof?"

Lord Hornsby laughed. "How can one prove something like that? New Scotland Yard laughs at me. I'm an old man, absent-minded, senile, and they patronize me. They listen and then send me on my way."

Kent Bailey digested all this while they had another glass of

port. The fire roared and outside it became dusk.

There was a knock on the door and Kent Bailey jumped to his feet. He went to the front door and opened it.

The trunk had arrived. Two burly men brought the trunk in and departed.

Lord Hornsby was on his feet and the years seemed to fade as he watched eagerly as Kent Bailey opened the trunk. There were papers and documents and letters. There was one letter addressed to Kent Bailey. The criminologist opened the letter from Jack the Ripper's brother.

Lord Hornsby watched Kent Bailey's face turn white. "Does—does he reveal his real name?"

Kent Bailey's face was rigid as plaster. "Yes. His real name was Hornsby."

The old man's hand dipped into his jack pocket. "I had hoped for your sake, that my brother would take the secret to his grave."

The hand came out, clutching the knife.

Kent Bailey shook his head slowly, his eyes pools of dark terror. "This can't be. I must be dreaming."

He stood frozen as Lord Hornsby approached, the knife held high.

A charred log fell from the fire place and sizzled.

*The murder had been committed so many
years in the past it was almost forgotten.
But a house can have a very long memory.*



A Person With A SQUARE WHITE BEARD

by DONALD HONIG



I WAS PLAYING in the back yard when I first caught sight of him. He was walking along the road, just coming to the crest of the hill, striding swiftly past the telephone pole that lifted from the roadside weeds into the country sky. Then, as he kept walking, the wild shrubbery that grew outside the yard obscured him and I lost sight of him. When he did not immediately reappear I forgot about him and went on playing, swinging in the old tire which

my father had tied to the arm of a towering elm.

Then, later—perhaps a half hour after—I decided to cross the road, and look down the meadow on the other side and watch the cows that were grazing there. As I walked down the driveway I saw him again. Evidently he had not walked past the house, for there he was, leaning on our mailbox, and staring upwards, his gaze fixed with melancholy or meditation upon the porch with

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its empty rockers, the ivy-wrapped pillars, the weathered shingles, and the dormer window in the gabled rooftop.

He was an old man. Of course I was only ten then and anyone with a streak of gray in his hair was an old man for me. But he *was* old. He must have been in his seventies, but his posture was erect and there could be no doubting his energy, since he walked the two miles, mostly uphill, from the bus depot in town.

He was neatly dressed, with a matching suit and tie, and a snap brim hat. He seemed not to see me, or to consider me not worth looking at, for I could not have stopped more than fifty feet from him, and I had been the only moving thing there in the quiet, windless sunlight.

He was so still, appeared so transfixed, that he began to frighten me, and I wished I'd had my B-B rifle. I backed away, still watching him. Then, when I was sure it was safe to turn my back, I ran full steam for the house, bounded up the porch stairs, and fled inside.

My father was sitting in an old wicker chair reading his paper. My entrance was not very civil and it startled him. He raised his eyes and looked at me with amused curiosity.

"There's a man outside," I

said. "He's staring at the house."

"Do you think he means to burn it down?" my father asked.

"He looks funny," I said. "He's an old man."

"Well," my father said putting aside his paper and rising, "let's have a look at this funny old fellow of yours."

I followed my father to the window. He pushed aside the lace curtain and peered out. The old man was still there—standing so motionless I had the feeling he hadn't even breathed since I'd last looked at him. My father hummed thoughtfully to himself.

"What do you think he wants, Maxie?" he asked me.

"I don't know."

"Well, suppose we go out and ask him."

I followed my father outside. We descended the porch steps and walked down the path to the front gate. The old man was staring straight at us. He had a searching look in his face, as if he were as curious about us as we were about him.

"Can I help you, sir?" my father asked.

"You must pardon me," the old man said. He removed his hat, and with his handkerchief wiped perspiration from his forehead. "I had quite a walk

up from the depot," he explained, apologetically.

"Perhaps you'd like to come in and have a glass of water," my father said.

The old man looked at my father with a sudden intensity that frightened me. But it did not last long, for his eyes softened almost immediately. He replaced his hat and put away his handkerchief.

"If you don't mind," he said, his voice barely audible.

I fell behind and followed them. My father walked slowly in deference to the stranger, who walked very slowly—slower than he had to, I suspected. He was staring again at everything—the fieldstone path, the lawn, the old trees around the side of the house.

Then we mounted the porch steps and he stood back for a moment and stared at the front door, and then at the porch and the ivy-wrapped pillars.

My father turned in the doorway and smiled kindly at him.

"Come in," my father said.

We went into the living room. I got the old man a glass of water and he sat perched on the edge of the sofa, his eyes fixed on the upstairs stairway that half showed from where he sat.

"This is your home, Mr. Fellows?" he asked my father.



"Yes," my father said. "We've been living here—how long is it now, Maxie?—three years, I believe. Just the three of us. My wife's in town for the shopping. I'm a painter," my father added, putting a cold pipe in his mouth. "This is lovely country for a painter."

"Yes, it is," the old man agreed vaguely. His eyes finally shifted from the stairway. "This house is very old," he said.

"About seventy-five years' worth," my father said.

"Eighty-five," the old man said, quietly knowledgeable.

My father smiled. "You seem to know something of it."

"My father built it."

"Then your name is Stringer."

The old man seemed pleased.

"I see you know your local folklore," he said. "Yes, I'm Roger Stringer."

"The little boy—" my father started to say, and then gave an embarrassed laugh.

The old man smiled. "You know the story?" he asked.

"Of course," my father said. "I'm always interested in the history of a place. When we bought it the real estate agent told us the whole story. I hope speaking of it doesn't make you uncomfortable."

"No," Mr. Stringer said. "After all, it's sixty-four years ago. I was about the age of your boy here." He looked at me. "Do you like living here, son? It is a lovely old house, isn't it?"

He didn't wait for me to reply, but went on. "We moved away soon after the trouble, of course. We moved clear to California. My father said we should get away, and begin a new life. So I grew up in California. It's been my home ever since. This is the first time I've been East since well since

I went West. I wanted to see this place again before I died. Do you think it strange of me?"

"Yes, in a way," my father said. "I would have thought you'd have forgotten the business by now. But then again—"

"No, Mr. Fellows," the old man said. "I've never forgotten it. Not for one single day of a long, long life."

THE STORY (I was familiar with it, of course, and it was the only thing about the place that I did not like) was as follows:

Sixty-four years ago three people had lived in what was now our house—Roger Stringer and his mother and father. His mother had not been good like my mother and she had taken a lover. The lover's name was Fred Anderson and he had lived in town.

It went on for some time and soon everyone knew about it. One day, in town, Mr. Stringer met Fred Anderson in the livery stable and in front of several men gave him a thrashing, and warned him that if he did not stay away he would kill him. Everybody was sure he'd learned his lesson.

But Fred Anderson did not take the warning to heart and several nights later, a snowy night, he came to the house to

see Mrs. Stringer. Mr. Stringer was away at the time and it was late at night. As Fred Anderson was walking up the staircase he was killed by a rifle shot fired from the living room. He died instantly. Mr. Stringer was arrested and accused of murder, even though many people thought he had been justified in protecting his honor.

Mr. Stringer denied all knowledge of the crime. First, he said he had been away from the house at the time, riding alone on the roads in his sled. But no one had seen him, and he had seen no one. His story was called 'shallow', and was disbelieved. And secondly, Mr. Stringer said that it really made no difference, that if he had been in the house he would have shot Anderson anyway.

When the police asked to see Mr. Stringer's rifle he said that it had been missing since the night of the murder. He presumed someone had stolen it. The weapon was never found.

A trial for murder was held and it seemed that Mr. Stringer was going to lose, and be sent to jail—or worse. But then Roger—who was then ten years old—was brought to the court as a 'surprise' witness. He had a story to tell, which he had previously revealed only to Mr. Stringer's lawyer.



He had been downstairs at the time of the murder, and seen Fred Anderson enter the house and begin to go upstairs. Even though it was rather late, he had gone downstairs, after his mother had retired for the night. He was asked if he had seen Anderson killed. He had, he said. By whom?

A person with a square white beard had done it, he said.

That was the story the boy told. It could not be shaken. The prosecuting attorney frightened the wits out of him. He held a Bible under the boy's

nose and told him it was the Book of God and that he had sworn upon its holiness to tell the truth. Was he telling the truth?

Yes, the boy insisted, and fought back. A person with a square white beard had done it. Who was this person? Roger had never seen the man before, nor did he ever see him again. How tall was this mysterious stranger? He did not know. How did the stranger get into the house? He did not know that either.

Why should the stranger have killed Fred Anderson? Perhaps the stranger had not liked him Roger said, and stubbornly insisted he was telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

The sheriff came to testify that only one pair of tracks—Fred Anderson's—had been found in the snow outside of the house. How had the person with the square white beard gotten into the house? No one could say, but the boy had sworn on the Book of God that it was so, and his testimony could not be shaken.

Mr. Stringer was acquitted. The jury believed Roger's story. Later, it was said, Mr. Stringer took the boy aside and asked him if he had spoken truthfully, and the boy had replied, "Yes,

sir. It was a person with a square white beard."

And in time even the most incredulous people came to accept the boy's story, for the boy was known to be very truthful.

And that was the end of it. The Stringers soon after removed to California where, apparently, the parents mended their broken life and lived out an uneventful domestic existence.

"I FEEL LIKE an intruder upon your privacy, knowing your story," my father said. "But after all, it is in the public domain."

"Do they still speak of it around here?" Mr. Stringer asked, mildly curious.

"I'm afraid they do. Or perhaps I hear of it only because I happen to be the occupant of the house."

"Was it true?" I suddenly blurted.

Mr. Stringer looked at me for a long moment, then nodded. "It was true," he said quietly.

"But they never caught him, the man with the beard," I said.

"The person with the beard. No, he was never caught. He disappeared, completely. No one ever saw him again."

"Were you glad Fred Anderson was killed?" I asked.

"Maxie—" my father said.

"Yes," Mr. Stringer said, staring hard at me. "I didn't like him, and I knew my father didn't like him. Wouldn't you have been glad—if you had been me?"

"I suppose so," I said.

Now Mr. Stringer got up and walked to the foot of the staircase. We followed him.

"He was just mounting to the third step when he was hit," he said. "He fell back and landed here. He never knew what hit him. Never said a word."

"Where were you when it happened?" I asked.

"I was there," he said pointing to where he had recently been sitting. "I had been downstairs, waiting for my father. Christmas was coming soon you know, and we were going to have a party. I was supposed to be the one to play the leading role."

He paused, an almost wistful

look coming into his eyes. Then he went on: "And then my mother screamed and I ran past Mr. Fred Anderson to there—" and he pointed at the fireplace in the dining room.

He walked toward it and crouched before the open hearth. Then he leaned forward, reached in and up, and loosened several bricks. From within the old, fire-scarred wall he withdrew something and held it in his hand, then replaced the bricks. When he stood up he looked at my father and then at me, apparently expecting some comment.

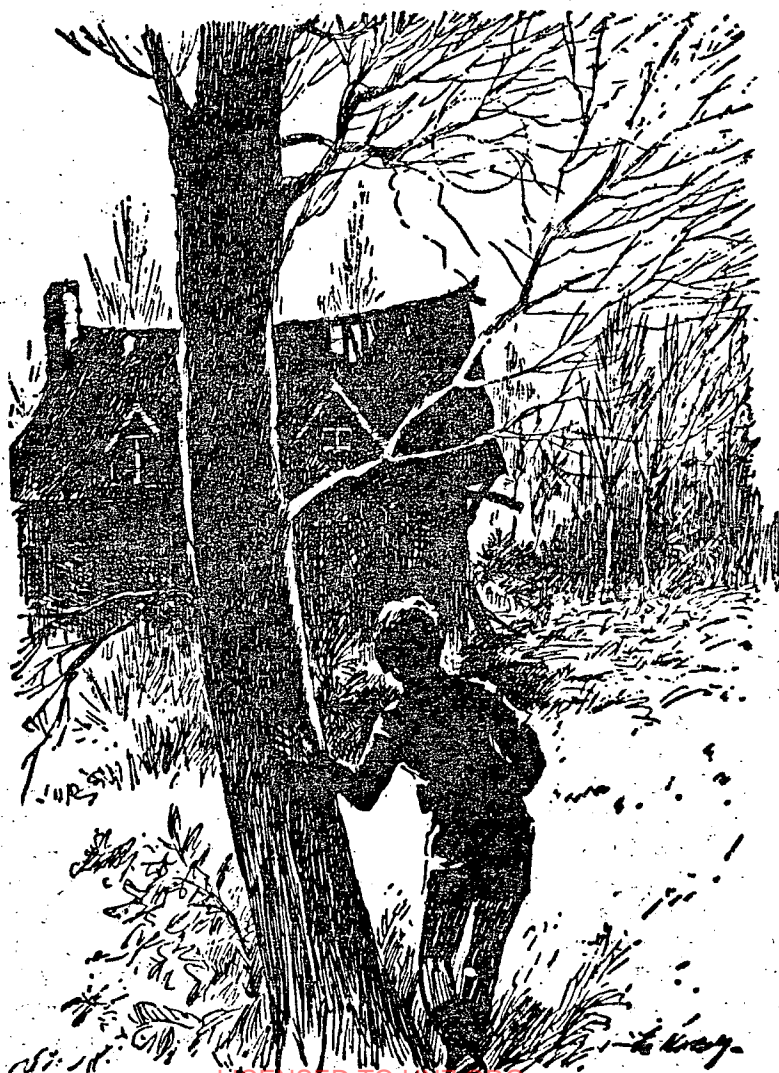
We said nothing. What he held in his hand was no longer white but yellowed and it did not look square.

But of course it was crumpled in his fingers.

"We never had the party," he said stuffing the false beard into his pocket. "But it was all right. I had already played my role."



IF I SHOULD DIE



BEFORE I WAKE

A dangerous psychopath can very easily underestimate the courage and ingenuity of a small boy... particularly when there are police officer traditions to uphold in a badge-wearing family.

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

THE LITTLE GIRL that had the desk in front of mine in 5-A was named Millie Adams. I don't remember much about her, because I was only nine then, not going-on-twelve like I am now. I only remember about those three lollipops—the two she got and the one she never got—and how we never saw her again after that. Me and all the fellows used to tease her a lot.

Afterwards when it was too late—I wished we hadn't. We didn't tease her because we had anything against her, but just because she was a girl. She had two pigtails hanging down her back. I had a lot of fun dipping them in my inkwell and sticking chewing-gum on them. I got kept in plenty for it too.

I used to follow her around the school yard at noon-recess pulling them and saying, "Ding ding!" like they were bells.

Millie used to say, "Tommy Lee, I'm going to tell a policeman on you!"

"Yah!" I hooted. "My father's a third grade detective. That's better than any policeman!"

"Well, then, I'll tell a second grade detective. That's better than a third grade one!"

That stumped me, so I went home and asked my father about it that night. He looked over at my mother, a little uncomfortably. She was the one who answered, before he did.

"Not better," she told me, "just a little smarter. Your father'll be one, Tommy, about the time he's fifty."

He squirmed, kind of, but he didn't say anything.

I said, "I'm going to be one too when I grow up."

Mother said, "God forbid!" but she seemed to be talking to my father more than me. "Never home on time for meals, Called out in the dead of night. Risking your life. Your wife never knowing when you'll be carried back on a stretcher—or

not at all. And for what? A picayune pension when you've given your youth and strength, and are not good to them any more!"

It sounded swell to me. He sort of smiled. "My father was one before me," he said. "And I can remember my mother saying the same thing when I was Tommy's age. You can't stop him. You may as well get used to the idea. It's in the blood."

"Yes? Well, it's going to come out of the blood, if I've got to use the back of a hair-brush to drive it out!"

Millie Adams, on account of the way us fellows had teased her, got in the habit of eating her lunch in the classroom instead of coming out in the yard.

One day when I was getting ready to go out with mine, she opened her lunch box and I saw this peachy green lollipop stuck in it. One of the kind that cost a dime apiece too; not just three cents. And green is lime, my favorite flavor. So I hung around and tried to make up with her.

"Let's be friends," I said. "Where'd you get that?"

"Someone gave it to me," she said. "It's a secret." girls always try to tell you that any time you ask 'em anything.

I knew better than to believe

her. She never had any nickels or dimes for candy, and Mr. Beidermann down at the candy store wouldn't even trust us for one of the three penny kind, much less a ten-cent one like this with wax paper on it.

"I bet you swiped it!" I said.

"I did not!" she flared. "A man gave it to me, I tell you! An awful nice man. He was standing on the corner when I was coming to school this morning. He called me over and took it out of his pocket and said, 'Here, little girl, you want some candy?' He said I was the prettiest little girl went by the whole time he was standing—"

Millie covered her mouth with her hand. "O-oh, I forgot! He told me not to tell anybody. He said he wouldn't gimme any more if I told anybody."

"Gimme a lick," I said, "and I won't tell anybody."

"Cross your heart and swear?"

I would have promised anything to get at it. My mouth was practically dripping across her shoulder from in back. So I crossed my heart and swore. Once you do that, you can't ever tell—especially if your father's a third grade detective like mine.

You're not like other fellows. You can't ever break your word, not even to a dumb thing like a girl. If you do, you're a

double-crosser. Father told me that and everything he says is true.

The next day when she opened her lunch box at noon, there was an orange one in it. And orange is my favorite flavor too. I was right here on the job, believe me. We shared it lick and lick alike.

"He's an awful nice man," she said. "He's got big eyes like a saucer and they keep looking all around. He's going to give me another one tomorrow. A cinnamon one."

Cinnamon is my favorite flavor too. "Bet he forgets," I said.

"He said if he does, I should remind him, and I can go with him and get it myself. I can take as many as I want. He's got a big house off in the woods, all full of lollipops and gumdrops and chalklit bars, and I can bring back as much as I want."

"Then why didn't you?" I jeered.

As though any kid in their right mind would turn down a swell chance like that! I knew she was just making the whole thing up to sound important and show off.

"Because it was one minute to nine and the bell was ringing already. Think I wanna be late and spoil my record? But tomorrow I'm gonna leave the

house early, so I'll have lots of time."

When we got out at three I steered clear of her, because I didn't want the other fellows to think I was a sissy. But she came up to me just as I was beginning a game of catch-ball with Eddie Riley and yanked my sleeve. We were about a block away, all going home in a crowd.

"Look!" she whispered. "There's that man I told you gave me the lollipops. See him standing down there under that awning? Now do you believe me?"

I looked but there wasn't anything wonderful to see. Just a man in slouchy old clothes, with great big long arms like chimpanzees have nearly hanging down to his knees. The blue shade from the awning came down over his face and shoulders, but you could see his eyes glistening through it.

He had a shiny jackknife in his hand and he was cutting a callus on his finger, and looking all around him like he didn't want anybody to see what he was doing.

I was ashamed to let Eddie Riley see me talking to a girl, so I shoved her away. She didn't have any lollipop left, anyway.

"Aw, who cares?" I growled. "Throw me a curve, Eddie!"

Eddie muffled a couple of

my throws, because he was going backwards, on our way home, and while he ran after the ball to pick it up, I had time to look around.

Millie and the man were walking down the side street holding hands with each other. But then all of a sudden he turned around and walked the other way in a hurry, and went around the corner without her like he forgot something.

Mr. Murphy, the traffic cop, came up the side street just then, on his way to stand in front of the school and direct traffic like he always did when we kids were let out. That was all.

Next day Millie finally broke her record. She didn't come to school all day.

I WAS KIND of hopeful that maybe she'd come the day after with all that candy, like she said, and share it with me. But the day after her desk stayed empty too.

The principal came in just before three, and we saw two men in gray suits that looked like truant officers standing outside in the hall. We all got kind of scared at first, but it wasn't anything. They weren't after any of us for breaking windows or anything. The principal just wanted to know if anybody present had seen Millie

Adams on the way to school day before yesterday.

One girl raised her hand and said she'd called for Millie. But Millie had left the house extra early, quarter past eight, so she'd missed her.

I was going to tell them what she told me, about that house full of candy in the woods. But I remembered I'd sworn and crossed my heart, and my father was a third grade detective, so how could I? I knew it was all just fibs anyway, and they'd just laugh at me or make me stand in the corner.

We never saw Millie again. One day about three months after, Miss Hammer's eyes were all red and wet, like she'd been crying just before the bell rang. She was our teacher. And from then on, my father wasn't home for nearly a week straight. He'd just come in late at night once in a while, for a shower, and go right out again.

One night through the door, I heard him saying something about "an escaped psycho." But I've never been quite sure what that word meant.

"If we only had some kind of a lead," he said. "Any kind of description at all to go by, no matter how sketchy! If we don't get him, you know, it'll only happen over again. It always does!"

I got out of bed and I went out to him. I said, "But, if a guy gives his word not to tell something, and his father's a third grade detective, can't he ever break his word?"

"No," he said. "Never! Only stool-pigeons tell, and welshers."

"One in the family's enough," my mother said sharply. "That'll be all of that!" She reached for her slipper, so I beat it.

Sometimes when he came home like that, that week, he brought papers with him. But when I'd find them the next day, the front page was always torn off, like it had somebody's picture on it I wasn't supposed to see. But I only went for the comic strips anyway. Then, after about a week, they were left whole again like before, and he started coming home for supper again.

Pretty soon all of us kids in school forgot all about Millie Adams.

I got promoted in the Fall, and in the Spring again, and in the Fall and in the Spring. I couldn't get anything higher than C's in proficiency and C-minuses in conduct.

But as long as I made it and didn't get left behind, my father would just shove my head with his hand and say, "That's all right, Tommy, you'll

make a good detective anyway. You're a chip off the old block."

Only he always said it when my mother wasn't around. Oh, I nearly forgot! He got made a second grade detective when he was only thirty-five yet, and not fifty like she said. She got kind of red when he reminded her, I noticed.

I was lucky all through 5B and 6A and 6B. I didn't have a girl sitting in front of me again until 7A. She was a new girl, transferred from another school. Her name was Beanie Myers. She always wore a white middy blouse, and she had a bunch of brown curls hanging down her back.

I liked her from the start, because she got very good marks. The way the work kept getting tougher all the time, it came in handy the way she let me look over her shoulders and get all the right answers. Most girls are stingy that way, but she was just like a fellow.

So when the other fellows started to tease her, I punched one of them in the nose and made them quit after that. But then she had to come up to me in front of the whole crowd and say, "Tommy Lee, I think you're awful wonderful!" I didn't like that much, you bet.

But outside of divvying her

dumb as other girls. She had one baby habit. She was crazy about colored chalk. She was always carrying it around with her, and whenever you saw pink or yellow streaks on a fence or the side of a house, you knew Jeanie Myers had passed that way. She just couldn't resist marking up everything in reach. She couldn't seem to go by anywhere without drawing a long track after her on a wall or sidewalk.

We fellows used lots of chalk too, but the plain white kind, and we used it for something useful like a baseball score or a game of prisoner's base, not just making wavy lines along fences. She didn't even know she was doing it half the time. She just walked along with her hand out tracing chalk-marks without looking.

Buying it all the time kept her pretty broke; that colored kind comes to a quarter a box, and sometimes she bought as many as two boxes a week. So she hardly ever had any money left over for candy. That was why I was so surprised when I saw her unwrapping the wax paper off this ten-cent lollipop one day at recess.

It was green. Lime is my favorite flavor, too.

"Yesterday afternoon," I accused her, "you wouldn't lend me a penny for caramels,

then you go and buy a whole dime lollipop, you piker."

"I did not!" she said. "A man gave it to me on the way to school this morning."

"Aw, since when do grown-ups hand out candy free to us kids like that?" I wanted to know.

"He did so! He's in the candy business, that's why! He's got a great big warehouse or somep'n full of it. I can have all I want for nothing, free. All I have to do is go there and help myself."

For a minute I had a funny feeling like somebody I once knew long ago had been given a green lollipop like that, and I tried hard to remember who, but I couldn't. It wasn't last week, or the week before, or last month. It wasn't even last year, and I could hardly remember back that far anyway, so I had to give up trying.

After she licked it down halfway, she split it with me. She was very nice that way, Jeanie.

"Don't let on what I told you to any of the other kids," she said, "or they'll want to get in on it too."

Next day when the bunch was all piling out into the yard at recess, she turned and whispered over her shoulder to me: "Stay in! I've got another one."

She kept the lid of her box down until they were all gone, then tipped it and showed me. It was orange, and orange is my favorite flavor. I shoved in on the seat next to her and we got to work between us. *Slup, slup, slup, here it's your turn now.*

I screwed up my face and kept staring at the blackboard, which was all empty. I kept trying to remember something about an orange lollipop too. First green, then orange. It was like I'd done all this before.

"Boy, am I having fun this week!" Jeanie raved between licks. "Every day a free lollipop for a treat. He's an awful nice man, whoever he is. Tomorrow what kind do you think I'm going to get? Cinnamon!"

Without knowing how it happened, I wasn't thinking about lollipops any more. I had an awful empty feeling, like I had to tell I didn't know who, and I didn't know what I had to tell, so how could I?

And then the one o'clock bell rang, and it was too late.

I HAD AN awful bad dream that night, about a lot of old newspapers lying on the ground out in the woods somewhere, and they all had their front pages torn off. Then when I picked them up and looked under them, somebody's whole arm was sticking up out of the

ground, stiff and dead, and the hand part was holding onto a bright red cinnamon lollipop.

Boy, it scared me! I woke up and pulled the covers all the way over my head.

My mother had to call me three times next day, I was so sleepy, and I just about made school by the skin of my teeth. I just landed in my seat as the bell quit ringing, and Old Battle-Ax Flagg gave me a dirty look, but she couldn't do anything about it.

When I got my breath back, I looked up and something looked different about the room. I could see Eddie Riley's head and shoulders up two seats ahead with no one in the way. Then I saw right away that was because Jeanie's desk was empty. And she was always in ahead of me. She'd never been late before.

Something had happened.

Flagg called on me right away, and I was kept too busy to think about anything but what the square root of some blame thing was. Then at ten after, Jeanie and another girl named Emma Nolan came in together.

When the period was over Old Hatchet-Face Flagg said, "Jeanie, you're staying in this afternoon for being late. Emma, I'll overlook it this time, because I know your mother's

sick this week and you have to help around the house."

It was the first time Jeanie had ever been kept in like that, and I felt kind of sorry for her.

At noon she took a red cinnamon lollipop out of her lunch box. She was boiling.

"I'd had a million of 'em if I hadn't run into that Emma," she complained. "We were on our way over to where he keeps his candy supply. It would of only taken a minute, and then she had to come along and spoil everything. He went off and left me! Now I can't go this afternoon either on account of being kept in!"

I wanted to be extra-special nice to her—we were going to have an exam next day and her answers would come in handy—so I said, "I'll wait for you outside, huh, Jeanie?" when the bell rang at three, and everybody but her got up to beat it.

I hung around playing ball with myself, throwing curves up into the air and running under them to catch them when they came down, and it sort of carried me down a ways without noticing it, until I was nearly two blocks away from the school. Then I missed one and I had to run after it, and it wound up in front of somebody's feet standing under an awning on the sidewalk.

I bent down and got it, and

then I looked up and there was a man standing there very still in front of me, in the blue shadows under the awning. He had big stary eyes and long arms like them chimps at the zoo, and he was doing something with his fingers, bending them in and out like he wanted to get hold of something with them.

He didn't pay much attention to me. I guess he wasn't interested in little boys. I looked at his face for a minute, and I had a feeling I'd seen it before some place. Especially them big saucer-like eyes. I backed away and went on playing ball, and he just stayed there where he was, without moving, except only his fingers like I told you.

I threw an extra high one, way up, and while I was staring straight up and watching it, all of a sudden a name seemed to come down and hit me out of the blue sky. *Millie Adams*...

Now I knew where I'd seen those funny eyes before, and now I knew who'd shared a green and an orange lollipop with me. He'd given them to her—and then she never came back to school any more. Now I knew what I wanted to tell Jeanie—not to go near him because something would happen to her. I didn't know what, but something

I got so scared I quit playing ball and I ran all the way back to school and went in the yard, which we weren't allowed to do after hours. I sneaked up outside the window and looked in.

She was still sitting there at her desk doing her homework, and Miss Flagg was up front correcting papers. So I started to tap as light as I could on the pane, to get Jeanie to turn around and look at me. She did, but then right while I was making signs to her, Flagg looked up and caught us, and she made me come inside.

"Well, Thomas," she said, sour as a lemon, "since you seem unable to tear yourself away from the classroom, suppose you sit down and go to work. No, not behind Jeanie—on the other side of the room, please!"

Then, after a couple minutes, just to make things worse, she said, "You may go now, Jeanie. You've stayed long enough. Tomorrow see that you get here on time."

But then when she saw me getting ready to get up and go with her, she snapped, "Not you, young man! Stay right where you are."

I couldn't hold back any more. I hollered out at her, "No! Miss Flagg, don't let her go! You can't! Make her stay

in! She's going after some candy and—"

She got riled as blazes and banged her hand down on her desk. "Here, here," she yapped. "That'll be all of that! Not another word out of you! Every time you open your mouth, I'm keeping you in another half-hour!"

I saw Jeanie gathering up her books and starting for the door, and I couldn't stand it. "Jeanie," I yelled at her. "Don't go out there! Wait for me outside in the yard!"

Miss Flagg got up and came down the aisle and stood over me. "Do you want me to send for the principal?" she asked. "I'll have you put back to Six-B if you make another sound! I'll have you expelled for insubordination!"

I never saw her get so sore before.

Jeanie was sore too—at me. "Snitcher! Tattle-tale!" she said under her breath, and closed the door after her.

I saw her go past the window outside, and then I didn't see her any more. She'd left the grounds.

I did my best to try and tell Miss Flagg, but she wouldn't let me talk. And I was half bawling, and so excited I could hardly talk straight anyhow.

"She's going to get some lollipops and she's never coming

back, and then the front pages of the papers are all going to be torn off and—!"

I was sobbing so hard I don't think she heard half I said. Her face was like stone, and she was writing a note to my father.

I yelled, "Like Millie Adams—and you done, you done it!"

She hadn't been on the staff when that happened to Millie Adams, so she didn't know what I meant. And she kept giving me another half hour and another half hour, until finally it was six.

I was licked and I knew it, and I just had to sit there mum, while the sun went down outside and purple shadows piled up in the school yard, and finally it was all dark and she put on the electric lights. Even then she wouldn't let me go, until the minute of six.

Then she made me take a note home with me, and when I rushed out and didn't close the door, she made me come back and do it over again.

When I finally got out for good and all, the streets around the school were dark and empty, just a bleary arc-light shining down on the corner, and when I passed where that awning was, it had been folded up for the night and there wasn't anyone standing there any more. Something funny went up and down my back.

like when a cat's fur goes the wrong way, as I went by there.

INSTEAD OF going home, I went to Jeanie's house first, which was off in another direction, and hung around outside trying to look in the windows and see if she was in there. They were all lit up and I saw her mother and her kid sister, but not her. Her mother kept coming to the window and looking out, and that's how she saw me.

Then she came out to the door and said, "Tommy, have you seen Jeanie? She should have been in long ago. I think she went over to Emma's house. If you see her, will you tell her to come right straight home? It's after six, and I don't like her staying out this late."

I felt sort of sick and scared, and I didn't have the nerve to tell her. I backed off the porch, and I said, "Yes ma'am," and I ran like anything.

Emma lived awfully far out, and she wasn't there. I knew she wouldn't be anyway, but I went to see, because Emma's family didn't have a phone. Emma came to the door chewing bread and said Jeanie never showed up at her house after she got let out. I didn't know where else to go but home then.

I would have been scared to



go there at all any other night but this. It was after seven already and was I in trouble! Just that night my father had to be home early, and supper was all over, and he was sore at me for being late. And I guess they'd both been kind of scared and they took that out on me, too.

I couldn't get a word in about Jeanie. I no sooner opened up about being kept in, which was only the first part of what I wanted to tell him, than he whacked me and told me to go to my room and stay there. Then while I was still trying to

tell him, he saw the note Miss Flagg wrote, and after he read that, that finished it. I couldn't get a word in sideways, he was making so much noise. He locked the door on me from the outside, and there I was.

Nobody seemed to know but me, and nobody would listen to me or believe me or try to help me. Not Miss Flagg, nor Jeanie's mother, nor even my own father, who I thought was such a regular guy. Now it was probably too late. I sat there on the edge of my bed in the dark and held my head.

I heard our phone ringing

through the door, and he quit ranting long enough to answer it. Then I heard my mother say, "Oh Tom, no—not again!" in a scared voice.

"What else could it be?" he said. "The Chief just said they found her school books lying there in an alley. I told you it would happen again, if we didn't catch up with him the first time."

He meant Jeanie! I knew he meant Jeanie!

I jumped up and started to wangle the doorknob like sixty, and holler, "Dad, lemme out a minute! I can tell you what he looks like! I saw him this afternoon! I saw him with my own eyes!"

But the front door banged before I got halfway through, and they'd both gone out without listening to me. I guess my mother must have gone over to stay with Mrs. Myers a while and try to buck her up. I kept up my racketing, but no one answered.

I didn't know what to do then. I sat back on the bed and held my head some more. I thought, "How they ever gonna get him, if they don't know what he looks like? I do, and they won't gimme a chance to tell them. I got to stay here shut up, when I'm the only one knows!"

Thinking about Jeanie made

me feel shivery even where I was, right in my own house. I wondered what a man like that would do to her. Something pretty terrible, because they hardly ever called my Dad up like that after he went off duty, and they had tonight.

I got up and went over to the window, and stuck my hands in my pockets and stood looking out. Gee, it was dark out! The street looked so scary and lonely, with just a pale arc-light way down by the corner. I thought of Jeanie out there some place, with something awful happening to her and nobody around to help her.

I took my hands out of my pockets and some of the junk I always carried around with me spilled out after them. Marbles and nails and a hunk of chalk.

I stood looking at the chalk for a minute and—

I threw up the window and climbed across and got out onto the porch shed. It slanted down, but I braked against the slates. We lived upstairs in a two-family house. Maybe a grown-up would have had a hard time shinnying down the porch-post to the ground, but it was a cinch for me.

I beat it off the block in a hurry, in case my mother should come back. I knew my father wouldn't. He stayed out whole days at a time when they

sent for him like this. After I got past the street that went down Jeanie's way, I wasn't worried about being spotted any more.

I went the same way I did every morning on the way to school—only I'd never gone to school at night like this before. But I didn't go all the way. I stopped two blocks away where that rolled-up awning was. Everything looked different from what it did in the daytime, the school black and the sky black and no kids around at all—only me.

I said to myself, "She bought a new box of chalk day before yesterday, because I saw a full-length stick in her hand when we got out at three." But it didn't last long, the way she wore it away against everything in sight. Suppose she didn't have any left—by today?

I went around the corner from where the awning was, and I started looking along the walls. There wasn't anything on them, but they weren't any good for chalking anyway. They were mostly glass storefronts and doorways. I went down the whole block and I couldn't see a mark.

I said to myself, "Maybe she was walking on the outside, where there's nothing but air."

That would explain it.

I got all the way to the next

corner, and I was going to turn around and go back, when I saw a hydrant out on the edge of the curb and it had a pink chalk gash across the hub. Jeanie—this afternoon! Because her house was up the other way. She never passed here on her way home other days.

I got all steamed up and I said, "I knew it would work! I bet I follow her! I bet I find her!" And for a little while I even forgot to be afraid. It was like that game we kids play, Hare and Hounds.

I ran across the gutter and went along the next block. There was still too much glass, which is no good for chalk, but there was an ash can sticking out that must have been there all day without being taken in. It had a wavy pink line around its ridges.

I kept looking, hard.

Next block didn't have anything, and there was a peach of a brick wall along it too, perfect for chalking. She wouldn't have passed that up, no sir! So I crossed over to the other side of the way, and she and he must have too, because there was a lamppost there and that had just a short little dab. It was skinny, there wasn't much room, and she just took a peck at it for good luck as they went by.

Next block had something,

and next, and then all of a sudden it quit. I went ahead looking, then had to come back again to where they ended. Did her chalk give out here, maybe? Did he catch her doing it and make her throw it away?

Not Jeanie—you couldn't get her to part with a piece of chalk for love or money. And he wouldn't get rough with her, because this was Allen Avenue, and in the daytime there was lots of people around, even if there was no one around now.

I turned off to my left—I know my left because your heart's always on it—and I went down that way. It wasn't as nice here as our part of town any more; a great big gas works, and old tumbled-down houses, and dark alleys and things.

But the chalking was swell. That was the trouble. There was too much of it. Nearly every wall and vacant space was crawling with it, and some of it was words you get your mouth washed out with soap for saying.

But it was all white chalk luckily. The colored kind costs too much, so I knew it wasn't Jeanie's. Then when I saw where a sudden bright yellow streak started up and went on and on, with just breaks where there were doors and windows, I knew I'd found her again. She'd run out of pink around

the corner and started in on a yellow stick, that was all.

IT WAS SO easy to follow, on account of being a thick hunk she was holding, that I started to run instead of just walking, to catch up quicker. I shouldn't have. All of a sudden without any warning a skinny little bit of an alleyway opened up alongside of me, and there was a whole lot of men standing around in it.

A car was fronted up to the curb with its lights shining smack into it. But what scared me worst about the whole thing was that one of those men was my own father. He was standing right in the middle of all of them!

Did I jump back quick! He had his back to me luckily, and didn't see me. I heard him saying, "... here some place. Well, the quicker we start a house-to-house search, the better, boys."

One of them was holding one of our arithmetics like we use in school, with our names and grades on the inside of the cover.

Was it Jeanie's?

I ducked around the back of the car, keeping out of the light, and got across to the other side of the alley. The yellow line went right on from there uninterrupted, about me

and Jeanie's reach from the ground.

I was dying to step up and tell him, "Dad, if you'll only follow this line, it'll take you to her. I know it will! But I didn't have the nerve. I knew what I'd get for being caught out on the streets that late without permission, especially after he left me locked up at home. He'd probably whale the daylighters out of me right in front of the whole bunch of them.

So I went off by myself into the dark, away from them all, and kept following the line on my own hook, and I guess they never even knew I passed there.

I couldn't understand why she'd throw her own books away into an alley like that. She knew better than to do that to school property of her own accord. And she was still all right up to here. Nothing had happened to her yet, or she wouldn't have kept on tracing this line.

The only thing I could make out was the man must have been carrying them for her, pretending he didn't want her to get tired, and he tossed them in there without her noticing, figuring she wasn't going to need them any more.

But they did go on farther, lots farther—so I guess she never noticed he got rid of her books for her. All of a sudden vacant

lots began showing up, and then there was one last house, and then the houses quit and it was the edge of town. Open fields started in from here on. The road kept going, but without any sidewalks any more.

Car lights were a help.

I'd never been this far out before, not even in the daytime, and I was stumped for sure now. There wasn't anything left to chalk up any more. But the yellow streak had run right smack up to the very edge of the end house, and then run off into thin air, so they must have kept pointed straight ahead.

I did too, but I sure wasn't keen on it. I had to walk in the dirt and stones along the side of the road, and jump back sometimes when cars came speeding by, so I wouldn't get hit.

Way up ahead—it seemed like a mile off—there was a row of bill-boards. It took me a long time to get up to them, but when I did I was glad I kept going, because the lower supports—the picture part way way up over my head—had little yellow strokes on them. So she'd still been holding onto her chalk even this far out.

It must have been lonely out here even in the afternoon, and now it was terrible. Just this gray road in the darkness, with black fields all around, and high

grass sighing in the wind. The road had lights on telegraph poles, but they were awfully far apart. And you felt worse after you left each one behind than you did before you came up to it.

She'd stroked them, though; they must have been walking offside like I was. Maybe he'd been afraid to ask for a lift while he had her with him.

I looked back, and the lights of the city were so far behind me I couldn't see them any more, just a haze in the sky over where they were. Gee, I wanted to turn around and go back, bad! But I kept thinking, "If I was in poor Jeanie's shoes, I wouldn't want the only fellow that knows where I am, to give up and go back!"

So I didn't.

There was worse coming up ahead, too. I tried to ignore it as long as I could, because I knew what it was, and I didn't like the idea very much either. Something even blacker than the rest of the blackness had been slowly coming nearer for a long time. Like a big black wall where the fields ended, and the nearer I got the taller it got, until it was 'way up over me. The woods!

Finally they got up to me and closed in around me on both sides. I took one last long look back, toward where my

father and those men were, so far behind me. Then I took a deep breath and held it, and kept moving, and I was in!

The road kept going right on through, and even the lights kept up far apart, so at first it wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be. I was careful not to look anywhere but straight ahead. I might have seen something I didn't want to. I was just as scared now to turn back as to go ahead. That's why I kept going ahead.

When I got up to the next light pole, she'd passed it too. But when I got to the one after that—she hadn't. They'd turned off somewhere in between the two. I thought, "Does this mean I have to go in among those trees and things, with him maybe behind one of 'em waiting to jump me?"

Boy, I sure felt little and lonely and scared. It was like dying a little to go in there. If I'd only had even just Eddie Riley along with me, or anyone at all, it wouldn't have been so bad.

I probably would have hung around there all night trying to make up my mind, when something did it for me all of a sudden. A roaring sound came heading toward me through the woods, and before there was even enough time to get scared, a pair of bright white headlights

came shooting down the road at me, with a car behind them headed in to town a mile a minute.

I only just had time to jump out of the way to keep from getting hit, it was rushing along so fast.

The brakes squawked and screeched and it stopped somewhere down the road out of sight, beyond the light. I ducked behind a tree, listening, and I heard a lady's voice say, "I'm telling you it wasn't an animal! I distinctly saw his face! Now what's a child doing alone in the woods at this hour of the night? Go back and see if you can find him, Frank!"

I heard the door open and a man got out and came back toward me calling, "Little boy! Sonny! Come here; we won't hurt you!"

Gee, I wanted awful bad to run out to him and say, "Take me in with you, will you please, mister?"

I turned and beat it away when he got too near, afraid he'd catch me and keep me from trying to find Jeanie or something. And that's how I got in the woods. I stopped again; in farther, and held my breath, so he wouldn't follow me by the noise I was making. I heard the car start up again, and caught a red wink from its tail, and 'way off between the trees, and

then it was gone and I was alone in the woods.

Once you were in under 'em, the trees weren't as thick-together as they looked from the outside. It was bad enough, but at least it wasn't like a jungle or something you read about in books.

About five minutes after I first went in, something funny started to happen. The tops of the trees all lit up red, like there was a fire around, and some of it got through down to the ground where I was. But then when it started to change to white little by little, I caught on it was a late moon coming up full. In one way, it didn't make it any better for me; it made it worse than before.

I could see my way better, but I could also see lots of spooky shadows and things that I couldn't before when it was all evenly dark. This way I saw too much.

I went roaming on, knowing I might lose the road for good and all, but too tired and scared already to care much if I did. Every once in a while I'd think I'd see something move, and I'd run—away from it, don't worry.

It was while I was sprinting like that, across a sort of open place pale with moonlight, that my foot caught over something and I took a full-length fall, and there was a clatter that nearly

busted my heart in two pieces.

It was Jeanie's tin lunch box, lying there on the ground.

She'd carried it all this way, thinking she was going to fill it up with candy. So now I knew I'd finally hit the place where she caught on, got frightened, and quit going any more of her own accord. He must have kept her attention, to keep her from noticing how far into the woods he was bringing her. But here she was where she finally tumbled something was wrong.

There were other things there beside the lunch box. I had to look a little, but I found them in the moonlight. Two brand new pieces of chalk that hadn't been used yet, but that somebody had stepped on and broken when they fell.

And I also found the black sailor-tie that she always wore around her middy-blouses. The bow was still in it, but it was torn in half, like he'd caught her by it when she tried to run away.

AHEAD, LIKE looking through a long black tunnel, there was another open patch of moonlight. I ran toward it, because I was too scared to stay there with that lunch box and those other things any more.

When I got to it and looked, somehow I knew it was the place. It was the place, all right.

There wasn't a sound, and nothing was stirring, but it was the place. It kind of—seemed to be waiting.

It was a much bigger clearing than the last. There was a crazy old decayed house standing right in the middle of it. It didn't have any glass in the windows, and you could tell no one had lived in it in a long time. Maybe it had once been a small farm or something, and it had been given up. There were trees in front, and bigger trees behind them. It just sat there in the moonlight, kind of waiting, as if to say, "Come on in, little boy," and then—*snap*.

I circled all the way around it: first, without coming out from between the trees. I dodged behind them from one to the other, and it felt like someone was watching me the whole time from those black holes of windows, waiting for me to come nearer.

Finally I got up my nerve and stole out into the open, on the side where the shadow of the house fell, and there was no moonlight to give me away. I got up close under one of the yawning windows and listened. I couldn't hear anything, but that was because my heart was thumping so hard.

I whispered very low, "Jeanie, are you in there?" and

then I nearly dropped dead, but nothing happened.

I was afraid to go around by the door, because that was the side where all the moonlight was, and I knew that warped porch would creak if I tried to cross it. So I finally reached up and caught the window ledge I was under with both hands and chinned myself slowly up, without scraping my feet against the weather-beaten old clapboards.

I'm a good chinner in school. But when my eyes came up over the sill, it was all black inside. I couldn't see a thing. I let myself down to rest, and I thought of a test to find out if it was okay to go in there or not.

I picked up a handful of gravel and tossed it in, and heard it light all over the floor inside like rain. I crouched, ready to sprint back to the trees, but nothing moved, nothing happened.

The house just seemed to keep on waiting. So I got up my courage and chinned myself up again, and this time I stuck my legs across the sill and got in.

I waited for hands to grab me, out of the dark, but they didn't, and after I was in a little while I could see moonlight reflected in the front part of the house and that sort of guided me. I went toward it

through an opening in the wall where there wasn't any door left any more, and came out into a hall. It was bright as milk out there, with moonlight spilling through the open door in front and the busted fanlight above it. Off to one side there were rickety stairs going up into the dark.

I put my hand on the post at the bottom of them and waited for more nerve to work itself up. When it had, I started inching up them, waiting on each step before I took the next. Every time they squeaked, I got off that place and moved to another. One time the whole thing snapped, like a log in a fire, and I waited a whole five minutes with my tongue hanging out, but still nothing happened.

When I was finally up on the top landing, there was a closed door off to one side of me. It wasn't missing like the ones downstairs. I put my hands against it, sucked in my breath, and started easing it open. If there'd been anyone in there, I kept reassuring myself, they would have heard me long before now. I finally got it back far enough to look in around the edge of it.

This room was on the moon side, but it had its shutters closed over windows with no glass left in them. Only crazy

little criss-cross chinks of light came through the slate. I whispered, "Jeanie, are you in here?"

I only had nerve enough to do that once in each room. But this time somebody sort of coughed. I had to grab my mouth with both hands to keep from shouting. I got all wet like it was summertime, but I was all cold like it was winter.

Before I could get my head back out of the door, the cough came again. It was such a little bit of a sound, like a baby choking, that I hung onto the door frame with both hands and managed to keep from bolting for the stairs. It almost sounded like a weak cough for help, if there is such a thing.

I could make out a lot of lumps on the floor, a pile of old burlap sacks, or something strewn around. I said "Jeanie", a little louder than I'd yet spoken, and to my horror they started to wave a little. I didn't know what was coming out of them, rats or snakes or—I hung on tight so as not to give ground.

What did come out of them was two feet. Little feet, a kid's feet, tied together. One was black with a stocking on it, one was white because the stocking had fallen down.

I wasn't afraid now. I knew I jumped over and pulled all the

empty sacks off, and I could see her white middy blouse in the dark. I felt for her face, and the reason she could only cough was her mouth had a rag tied across it.

I took a terrible chance and scraped one of the matches from my pocket along the floor. I could have opened the shutters, but that would have taken longer. The match showed there wasn't anybody else but us in the room. Her eyes were shining, but it was all black around them where the tears had been running down her cheeks for hours steady. I took a good look at the knot on the gag and then I put the match out. I needed both hands.

I got it off easy. I'm good at knots. He'd tied the cords around her hands and feet good and tight, but my fingers were smaller than his. I could get them in places he couldn't. Even so it seemed to take ages, and I kept expecting to feel somebody grab the back of my neck any minute.

I slipped my arm under her and helped her to sit up. She cried a little more just from habit, because she'd been crying so long already.

"Where'd he go?" was the first thing I whispered.

She quit crying long enough to let some voice through.

"I—don't know," she whispered back.

"Has he been gone long?"

"When the m-moon came up."

"Did he go out of the house?"

"I think so. I heard his steps go 'way outside."

"Maybe he's gone for good," I breathed hopefully.

"No, he said he—he was just going to dig the hole. He said he was coming back and—do it then."

"Do what?"

"K-kill me with that knife he's got. He pulled a hair out of my head right in front of me and tried it on the knife to see if it was sharp enough."

WE BOTH LOOKED all around us fearfully. "Let's get out of here," I said hurriedly. "Can you walk?"

"My legs are asleep." One of them gave under her when she tried to stand up and she nearly went down, but I caught her just in time.

"Hold onto me tightly," I urged her.

We got out the door that way and to the head of the stairs. The moonlight down below in the hall looked wonderful—if we could only get down there and out where it was.

"Don't make any noise going



down now," I cautioned. "He may be around out there some place."

We hobbled down them quietly and to the head of the stairs. The side close up against the wall, me feeling our way along it, she hugging me close. The circulation came back in her legs and it got easier for her to use them. We were only about a quarter of the way

down from the top when it happened.

I think both of us shouldn't have stood on the same step at one time. That was it. Something banged like a gun, and the step split in the middle and went down like a V. My whole foot went in and through. The toe part got caught down below the split and I couldn't bring it back again.

We both worked like sixty, she with her hands and me with my hands and feet both, trying to get it loose again. I couldn't, no matter how I turned it. The board had snapped part way back and it hurt something awful the way it squeezed. I couldn't even get down to my shoe and unlace it, or I would have tried pulling it out of that.

We had to quit finally. We got so tired out pulling and hauling at it. We both had to sit down together on the step above it—I could do that—and rest. And wait.

"Jeanie, go ahead," I kept begging her. "Get down there while you still can make it, and—and keep going straight over that way, with the moon behind you, until you get to the road—"

She hung onto me like glue with both hands and wouldn't budge. "No, no! I'm not going without you. If you have to stay, then I'm going to stay

too. It wouldn't be fair, Tommy—"

We sat without saying anything for a while—just listening. Listening hard. Once in a while we tried to cheer each other up.

"Maybe he won't come back till daylight, and somebody else'll find us first."

But who would come to a forgotten house like this way out in the woods?

"Maybe he won't come back at all." But he hadn't gone to all the trouble of bringing her here just to leave her tied up, and we both knew it.

Once she asked, "Why do you suppose he did it? I never did anything to him."

I remembered something my father had said when that happened to Millie Adams that time. "He's an escaped psy—psycho or something."

"What do they do to you?" she wanted to know.

I wasn't sure. I only knew they found them out in the woods under old newspapers long afterwards. But I couldn't tell her that, because she was only a girl.

"I—I guess they like to scare you and tease you lots."

"He did already," she shivered. "He kept drinking out of a bottle and singing loud without any tune, and then he'd make me feel how sharp

that knife was, and he cut off one of my curls and waved it around on his finger."

Something crunched outside the house like the stones, and our arms grabbed each other so tight we were just like one kid instead of two.

"Quick, Jeanie! Run!" I told her, giving her arm a squeeze. She couldn't even whisper, she was so scared. All she could do was shake her head.

There weren't any more crunches for a minute, and we thought of everything we could that would help and said it into each other's ears.

"Maybe it was just something fell down off a tree."

"Maybe he won't come in, maybe he'll stay out there."

We both saw the shadow at the same time, and gave a heave together. It was in the middle of all the white moonlight on the floor down below, like someone was standing close up against the front doorway listening. It didn't move at first. Just stayed still, a big black head and shoulders.

We lay back flat against the slope of the stairs and tried to get in as close as we could against the wall where it was darker. But my foot wouldn't let me move much from where I was, and her middy blouse was so white.

The black shadow was

moving now. It was coming further in. It was spreading across the moonlight like ink on a blotter. It got longer and longer and longer, and grew a pair of long legs like a man on stilts. He was down there below us in the hall now.

I breathed into her ear, "Hide your face against me. Don't look at him! Maybe he won't see us."

She turned her face around the other way like I said, and I went on looking through her hair.

The stairs shook a little. He must have put his foot on them. Then he put his other foot down, and they shook some more. He came up like a cat, hardly making any sound at all with his feet. But we could hear his breathing plain.

I guess he hadn't seen us yet because he had just come in out of the bright moonlight. The higher up he got, the more of it he shut off from us. All I could see now was a black shape in front of us.

Jeanie tried to turn her head back again to see, but I grabbed it with my hand and held it.

All of a sudden he stopped, with a creak of the whole staircase, and didn't move. I guess he'd seen the white of her blouse up there ahead of him.

There was a scathing sound and yellow shone out all over the

stairs and he was holding a match out to us!

It wasn't very bright, but it was plenty for him to see us by. And us, him!

I'd been right! It was the man under the awning! But what good did that do now? Those long arms, and saucer eyes, and gee, what a fierce face! Then he started to smile like he was tickled.

He said, "Oh, so a little boy came too, while I was gone."

He came up a step. "And you both got all the way out here and then you couldn't get any farther—hee, hee!"

And he came up another step. "Well, I don't like little boys much, but as long as you came all the way out here, I'll have to make the grave a little bigger!"

I started to tuck my free leg up under me, to stay as far away from him as I could as long as I could. Jeanie was shivering against my side.

"Get out o' here, now!" I said in a scared voice, very low. "Get out o' here, now! Leave us alone!"

He came up another step and he was bending right over us, double nearly. I couldn't hold out any more, even if I was going on twelve. "Dad!" I started to holler. "Oh, Dad, quick!"

"Yes, call your Daddy," he

said silkily, reaching out one long arm for Jeanie's blouse. "Call your Daddy. He'll find you all cut up in little pieces."

I DIDN'T KNOW what I was doing any more. I struck out at him with my free leg.

My foot went right into his stomach and he never expected it. He made a funny sound like "Oof!" and the match went out. The staircase gave a worse bang, even, than when my foot got caught.

He went thumping all the way down to the bottom, and a whole lot of dust came up all around. When I could see the moonlight through it again, there was a big black gap in the middle of the case, but not too wide to jump across, and the rail was off, and the whole thing was tipping sideways from the wall, but not enough to spill you off. And best of all, oh best of all, my foot was free!

He was down there at the foot of the stairs lying back on his elbows. But he didn't seem to be hurt much. He jumped right up and gave a roar, and reached into his clothes, and when he swung his hand back, something flashed in it in the moonlight.

"Jeanie, quick! My foot's out!" I shouted, and we both went scampering.

We got back in the room

where she'd been tied and shut the door with a bang. He had to come up real slow and careful after us this time, so the stairs wouldn't give way altogether, and that gave us time to run all around the place looking for things to block up the door with. There wasn't much—hardly anything at all. Just two empty packing cases and they hardly weighed a thing.

We couldn't get out through the window, because Jeanie couldn't have made it, jumping from that high up.

We got the two packing cases up against the door one on top of the other, and then I got behind them to hold them, and she got behind me. We could hear him testing his way carefully up, growling and cursing us. We could even hear his clothing brush the thin wall between us and him. Finally he gave a horrid laugh, and that showed he was up on the landing already. Then he rushed at the door.

The shove pushed the door and the cases and her and me back a little, but we managed to squeeze it closed again.

"Should I pray?" Jeanie panted.

"Yeah, you better," I puffed, leaning with all my might.

She started to jabber in back

of me, "*If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord—*"

He gave another heave, and this time it opened the widest of the lot. I couldn't squeeze it back where it was any more. His shoulder got in and one of his long arms came through, trying to reach at me.

"Pray louder," I wailed at her. "Oh Jeanie, pray louder! I can't hold it—any more!"

Her voice rose to a scream. "*If I should die before I wake—!*"

The fourth heave finished us.

We all went down together, me and her and the cases, and the door swept us back against the wall. That saved us for a minute. He came too far into the middle of the room before he could stop and turn.

I kicked one of the cases toward him, so it would get in his way, and we both scrambled to our feet and ran, she one way, I the other.

He went for her, with the knife out again. I got all the way around the door and out into the hall, but I had to come back again. She'd gone the wrong way, and he'd cornered her over on the other side of the room.

She kept running back and forth in front of the shuttered windows, from one corner to the opposite one, trying to get

by him, and he kept dancing in

front of her, waving the knife.

I grabbed up a case, tilted it way up over me with both arms, and threw it at him right on the back of the head all right, and he stumbled for a minute. But it was empty, and he stayed right on his feet.

He whirled and said, "I'll get to you in a minute!" and he swung one of those long arms at me with a *whish*—like I was a mosquito.

The back of it swiped my head, and something like a comet with a white tail seemed to hit me, and I was way over at the wall, slumping all the way down to the floor. The last thing I saw was him snatching up one of those sacks to throw it over Jeanie's head like a net.

The comet kept getting brighter and brighter, and it switched over by the open doorway instead of my head, and split up into two or three comets, and some men came crashing in behind pocket flashlights, like the one my father carries.

One of them even seemed to be him but I knew better than to believe that. I knew I was just dizzy. I closed my eyes and sort of went to sleep for a few minutes, wishing I'd been able to save Jeanie.

When I opened my eyes I seemed to be floating around halfway between the floor and

ceiling, and when I looked around, so was Jeanie. We were both sort of swinging around up in the air. I thought maybe we died and turned into angels, but it was just a man holding her in his arms, and another one holding me.

"Now easy on those stairs," one of the men said.

Neither one of them was my father though. But I saw him across the room swinging his arm up and down, with something that looked like a blackjack in it, and two of the other men were trying to grab his arm and hold it.

I heard him saying, "Too bad I didn't get out here a little ahead of the rest of you. Well, I may have to bring him in alive, now that there are witnesses. I'm damned if I'll bring him in conscious."

They took Jeanie and me to the doctor to be looked over as soon as we got back. He said we would both be all right, only we'd have bad dreams for a while maybe. I wondered how he knew ahead of time like that what kind of dreams we were going to have.

When we got home I asked my father, "Did I do all right, Dad?"

He took out his badge and stuck it on my pajamas.

"You make me look like a piker!" was all he said.

THE MOONLIGHTER



He watched the store. Six customers. Then three. Soon there would be only one. His hand felt the gun. Soon it would be the time ...

BY JACK RITCHIE

ED CERVIC stepped behind the magazine racks and checked the snub-nosed thirty-eight once again. It almost slipped from his damp hand as he put it back.

He moved slightly to the left and his eyes went over the interior of Larson's Drugstore.

Ten minutes ago there had been six customers. Now there were just three: the elderly woman peering at the shelf of patent medicines, the young punk eyeing the pipe displays, and the girl in her twenties leafing through the greeting cards.

And Larson. At the cash register filling out some kind of an order form.

How would he react? Cervic wondered. Would he get hysterical? Maybe faint? Sometimes

they did that. Or would he try to be a hero?

There was no way to tell beforehand. Cervic wiped his right hand on the side of his trouser leg.

Larson looked his way.

Cervic picked up a magazine at random and opened it. One of those things about automobiles.

Automobiles.

Cervic smiled grimly. What a lemon he got for himself. Only two years old and already he had to have a new transmission put in. Three hundred and sixty bucks. And then last month a new battery and a generator practically at the same time.

Another fifty-six bucks down the drain.

And then that damn thermostat.

Ed Cervic swore softly.

And still making payments on the car. Had to go to the bank for re-financing after the transmission conked out. It sure played hell with the budget.

How the devil did other people manage to get along on their salaries?

The answer was that they didn't.

His brother-in-law, a teacher, what he earned wasn't enough. Evenings and weekends he drove a taxi. And Cervic's neighbor, Charley. He worked for the post office from eight to

five. And after that he tended bar.

Ed Cervic swore again.

That damn thermostat was the last straw. Until then he'd just about been able to get by.

His eyes went over the store.

The old lady was gone. Good. But the punk and the young girl were still there.

Larson was at the phone. He looked Cervic's way.

Cervic put the magazine back on the shelf and pulled a newspaper from the wire rack. His fingers made wet marks on the edges of the paper as he turned to the local news.

He read the article again.

Always drugstores.

Why not drugstores? Cervic thought. If you got something good going there's no sense in taking chances with something new and new problems.

His lips twitched slightly as he read the description. At least everybody agreed on that. Medium height, medium weight, medium brown hair. In his thirties. Slipped a handkerchief over his face when he pulled the job.

Seven drugstores so far.

Always in the same neighborhood. Always between five-thirty and six-thirty in the evenings.

Ed Cervic smiled tightly.

Maybe he's got a job and he can't get off until five. Maybe

he's just a poor slob who can't stretch the pay check far enough. Maybe he's got just enough time to rob a drugstore before he catches the subway home.

Cervic looked up at the wall clock. It was now a quarter after six.

He had to be home by seven thirty. Madge would be waiting with supper.

His eyes covered the store again. The young punk was gone now. Just the girl left. And Larson was waiting on her.

The front door swished open softly and Cervic stiffened at the sight of the blue uniform.

Damn, he thought, damn.

Obviously a rookie. One of those big smart young ones. One of the kind that could mess up everything.

Cervic turned a page of the newspaper. He took a deep breath and waited.

The cop stared at him for a few seconds and then went towards the door. He left.

Ed Cervic exhaled.

The young girl took her thin paper bag of greeting cards and stepped out into the street.

Just him and Larson in the store now.

Twenty-five after six. He put the newspaper back in the rack.

He felt his heart begin to pound.

The handkerchief.

CAPTAIN HARRISON was pleased. "We staked out twenty places in the neighborhood and figured he was bound to bite at one of them. Turns out he's just some poor sucker who's having trouble with his finances at home.

Larson poured himself something from a bottle. "When he walked in here with that handkerchief over his face, I almost fainted."

"Did you have any trouble?" Harrison asked.

Ed Cervic shook his head. "No, Captain. I guess I was just about as scared as he was, but when I called out, he dropped the gun."

Harrison grinned. "I remember how nervous I was on my first stake-out, Ed. But you get used to it after a few times."

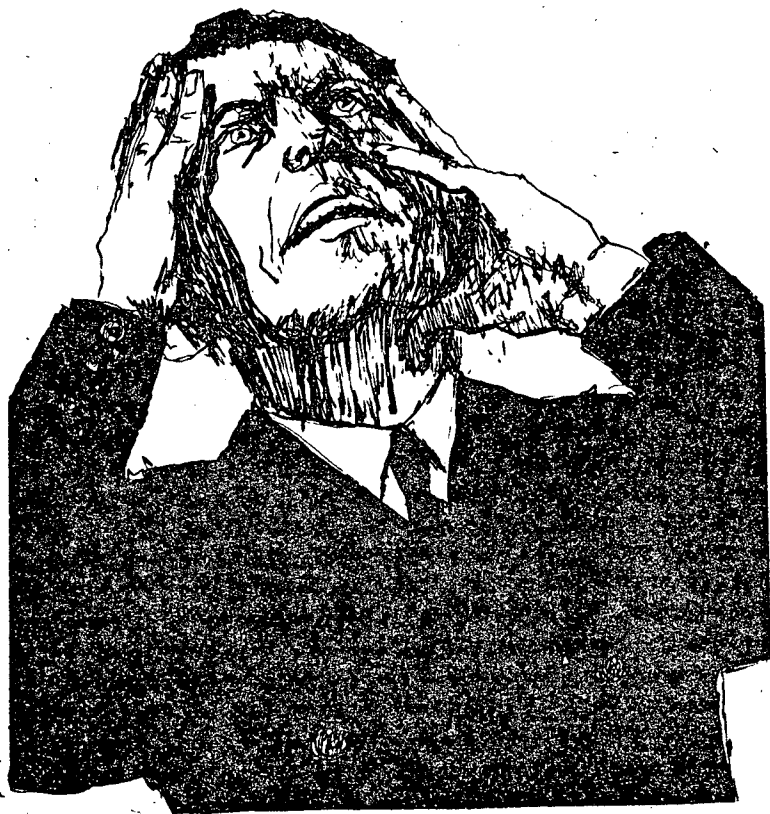
Cervic's eyes went to the clock again. All this was taking time. He'd probably have to phone Madge and tell her that he was skipping supper.

She wouldn't like that, but he had to get to Mario's Service Station before nine.

If Harrison ever found out, Ed Cervic stood a good chance of getting kicked off the force. Filling gas tanks and wiping windshields wasn't exactly what a cop should be doing off-duty, but damn it, nowadays, you had to moonlight to make ends meet.

THE TORMENTED

by JAMES McKIMMEY



An Unusual Novelet of Chilling Suspense



He was safe now. No one would ever know, for dead men tell no tales. Yet, in the night, he remembered what the slain man had written: This money is tainted. Only Death comes with it...

A CHILLING EVENING wind blew across the small cross-roads town on the spine of the Coast Range Mountains. Inside the Copper Lantern Bar and Restaurant the air was fragrant and warm from logs blazing in the huge stone fireplace. The aroma of charcoal-broiled steaks and garlic bread came from the restaurant section, whose broad windows overlooked the vast spread of the San Francisco Peninsula below.

David Farrel sat at the L-shaped bar and ordered another beer. It was a Thursday and customers were sparse. Only two parties were dining. Farrel and three other locals sat at the bar; one was Vince Ecker, a regular.

"Eggskull!" Ecker boomed to Farrel from down the bar. Loudly, Farrel thought. Always loudly.

He turned his head to look at the large, sinewy man whose

eyes were the color of gun metal—which was appropriate, Farrel thought. “I’m thinking, Ecker.”

Ecker wheezed—there was no other description for his laughter. “That’s what you do, all right, Eggskull. Think. But it don’t make you any money.”

The man wore a black nylon jacket, tan Levis and hunting boots. A white Stetson was pushed back from his pulpy, cruel face. His ski-styled sun glasses rested on the dark wood beside his beer bottle. He grasped the bottle with a broad, stub-fingered hand and drank.

He was a primitive, Farrel thought bitterly, born into an advanced civilization that had done little to bring him up beyond his animal status. Yet he had been able to secure himself a good living as a construction foreman. He also owned a shrewd child-like ability to make the savage cut, as he had just done again.

He knew that Farrel had received a lengthy college education, but Ecker also knew that Farrel was presently living near pauperhood, trying to support a wife and child on the meager pay he received as a book clerk in Palo Alto, ten miles below. But that particular situation was going to be corrected, Farrel thought.

“Is that the extent of your

contribution?” he asked acidly. He was as large as Ecker, but there was a difference in their physiques. Beneath Farrel’s bulk was fat, not muscle. His face was pale, against the weathered brownness of Ecker’s. He would have liked to have suddenly transformed himself into a tough and muscular specimen in order to take care of Ecker physically. But there were more realistic ways.

“I was wondering if you want to go night-cooning again,” Ecker said.

Farrel turned away as Ecker began wheezing again. He remembered vividly that night two weeks ago when he’d gone hunting with Ecker. Out of some foolish belief that he should test his courage in Ecker’s presence, he’d agreed to it despite the fact that, unlike Ecker, he had never wanted to see any animal killed.

He’d got into the man’s pickup truck with four lean hounds inside the special compartment built on the flatbed behind. They’d driven on to a narrow road at the rear of the large rental ranch owned by Martin Brindmart, a retired investor who lived in seclusion in his sizeable house built on that land.

He’d got out of the cab as the carbine-carrying Ecker had walked behind the truck to

open the dog's compartment. The hounds sprang out in smooth, stretching leaps and immediately began ranging noses to the ground and yipping.

Ecker switched on his powerful flashlight as the dogs found a scent and gathered to bound into the darkness.

Farrel was a lover of nature. He particularly liked animals. He loved to hike through the hills to observe deer grazing on the highest slopes. He liked to see rabbits springing away from his step. He liked cats and dogs—even the hounds owned by Eckert, who had been bred and trained to lead the butcher to his quarry. All animals, he thought, could be categorized into just what they were.

The devious breed was human. He cared little for anyone of those, including his son Jolly, and certainly his wife Milly, who refused to allow him to own a pet of any kind.

Yet here he was, walking across a field with a killer of deer, raccoons, anything on which he could sight his gun. Because he was growing increasingly more nervous, he tried to make conversation: "Doesn't Brindmart mind our being out here at night?"

"Minds any time, Eggskull. To hell with him. I've took more deer meat off this land of

his than you could figure. What's he going to do about it?"

"He's peculiar, isn't he?"

"Hermit, that's what he is. Even his own foreman don't get beyond his fence. Only me, when I deliver his supplies every Saturday."

"How come you, Ecker?"

"I trained his dogs. You ever see them?"

"I hiked in one day to where Rawls' house is by the gate. I saw them."

He pictures those two dogs running back and forth behind the steel barbed-wire topped fence that Martin Brindmart had ordered built around his house: German shepherds, trained to attack on command. Trained, he now learned, by Vince Ecker.

"Them dogs would listen to two people only. Brindmart and me. No more, though. They're dead and buried."

"What happened?"

"Someone threw them a hunk of poisoned meat. Now I got to train me two more for him."

Farrel stepped gingerly over the tufted grass. "I hear Brindmart's rich."

"Yeah," Ecker said shortly.

"Why does he hide away like that?"

"Who knows? He's a nut."

But Farrel was not so sure

about that. Having seen Brindmart's sanctuary, he'd become increasingly envious of the man. Brindmart's life, he'd decided, was one of perfection. Free of all worries and all responsibilities, he could live exactly as he chose.

As Farrel moved apprehensively through the night, with the dogs running ahead of them, he was regretting everything. Because of a small inheritance, he'd been able to remain in college for graduate study in English literature. He'd been content there. But then he'd met Milly and made the unfortunate mistake of marrying her on a slightly drunken weekend in Reno. Now they had Jolly, a bit under two years old. Farrel, who'd failed at a brief stint of teaching, had been required to become a clerk in a book store to support them. He would gladly, he thought, trade places with Martin Brindmart.

The sound of the dogs turned into a wild chorus of barks and yelps.

Ecker hurried his pace. "They got one."

Farrel followed him reluctantly over the rise of a hill, then down where the dogs were gathered around the trunk of an oak. Ecker pointed his flashlight upward to find the treed raccoon. The animal's eyes

glowed against the light. Ecker handed Farrel the flash.

Listening to the bedlam of the dogs, feeling his throat dry, Farrel held the beam on the raccoon as Ecker carefully lifted his carbine. There was the crack of the rifle, and Farrel closed his eyes. As Ecker reclaimed the flashlight, Farrel looked again and saw that the raccoon had dropped to the ground, where it was slashing, biting and growling viciously, as the dogs darted at it.

"You didn't kill him," he managed.

"Hell, no!" Ecker said happily. "The dogs do that. I just winged him."

Farrel watched in horror as a small hound's belly was slashed by the raccoon's claws. "You're letting your own dogs get killed!"

"I get some more!" Ecker said in delight.

Farrel looked again at the bloody, raging battle. Then he trotted away. He stumbled over another small rise and sat down weakly beside the trunk of a small, wind-warped tree. He thought he would be sick for a time, listening to that wild sound of battle behind him. Then he managed to control himself.

He finally realized that he was sitting in a small cleft of a hill which rose directly above

Martin Brindmart's house, no more than five hundred yards below. Outside the fencing, there were the lights of the smaller house used by the foreman, Cass Rawl. Then the long run of dark space to the larger house where light shown from a wide window.

Farrel used his excellent eyes to see that Brindmart was reading a book in a leather chair beside a desk and fireplace. He was lean, white-haired, and wore dark-rimmed glasses. He put the book down and walked to a wall.

He reached under a corner of the desk, and a panel of the knotty pine wall slid back. He reached inside the recess and drew out what was obviously a packet of currency. He put his hand beneath the corner of the desk again; the panel closed. He placed the packet in a drawer of the desk, then returned to his chair and began reading again.

Farrel rubbed his mouth. Finally he returned to the truck, where he waited in the cab until he was startled to find Ecker's flash suddenly lighting the hood. A ripped carcass of a raccoon was slapped down on the metal. Ecker wheezed with laughter. "What's the matter, Eggskull? You don't like fun?"

listened to Ecker wheezing again.

"He just don't like that night-cooning no way!"

The bartender diplomatically refused comment. Instead he said, "How's that new Winchester working out, Vince?"

"Best you can buy," Ecker said with enthusiasm. "I got that thing zeroed in so I could shoot the eye out of a gnat at a thousand yards. It's really the very best."

Farrel sat holding his glass, staring straight ahead, reviewing everything he'd learned since he'd seen Martin Brindmart remove that currency from the recess hidden behind the paneling. By discreet questioning, he'd found out that Brindmart never left the privacy of his fenced acreage. One of the single personal contacts he made was with Cass Rawl, his foreman. Most of that was accomplished by phone. Fees for renting his ranch land were collected in cash by Rawls, who then turned them over to Brindmart. Farrel was reasonably certain that the man used no bank.

The only other person who dealt with Brindmart was Ecker, who was paid to bring in Brindmart's supplies every Saturday morning, a habit begun

FARREL POURED beer when Brindmart had added the from his new bottle and attack dogs to his protection;

no one but Ecker could have gone past them.

But Brindmart was now temporarily without dogs, and that, Farrel thought, was going to make the difference. Give credit to Ecker for it.

Farrel had heard the general community opinion that it had been Ecker himself who'd poisoned the animals—they would have accepted meat from no one but Ecker or Brindmart—in order to sell Brindmart two new ones. Ecker was disliked by most everyone who knew him. And that too, Farrel told himself, was going to count.

The door opened; the cutting wind blew through the interior. The logs in the great fireplace snapped as blue-yellow flames wavered. Cass Rawl stepped in, wearing a cowhide jacket with butter-colored Sherpa pile, a full black Stetson, overall pants and worn cowboy boots.

He was a thin man in his early thirties; but his face was already deeply lined from exposure to weather. He nodded briefly to Farrel, who had talked to him casually last week, when Rawl had stated his dislike for Ecker in his North Texas drawl: "A damned sadistic butcher. If Mr. Brindmart hadn't got hooked up with him on account of the dogs I'd

never let him set foot on the ranch. The way it is, he delivers supplies every Saturday, nine in the morning. I press the switch and open the gate and wave him through. That's all I'll have to do with him. I ever catch him hunting on Mr. Brindmart's property, I'll see he's prosecuted."

Rawl walked to Ecker, who smiled and looked at his beer bottle. Rawl handed him a folded sheet of paper. "List of all the stuff he wants on Saturday."

"Okay."

"Somebody was coon-hunting two weeks ago. Heard it, at night. If I catch a man doing that on Mr. Brindmart's property, I go for him personally."

"You told me that already. Think it was me?"

"I know it was."

"Maybe it was Farrel over there. Give him the lecture."

"Somebody's been night-hunting deer, too. Freezing them with a flashlight and shooting them that way. Next time he does it, he'll get the book thrown at him."

"Wonder who it was?" Ecker said, still smiling.

"Somebody using a Winchester Seventy."

"How do you know?"

"Know the sound."

Ecker shrugged. "Doubt it. But even if you do, lots of

people use a Winchester Seventy."

"Deliver the supplies, Ecker," Rawl said tightly. "Train the dogs. Otherwise, stay off the land and away from Mr. Brindmart." He wheeled and left.

Ecker delivered his laugh and pushed his empty beer bottle away. "I got to get home and feed them dogs. Seven I got now, counting the new shepherds."

Farrel tapped the bar and placed a bill on the wood. "Buy him a beer."

Ecker looked at him in surprise. "What's got into you?"

"I'm trying to make friends. Complaining?"

"Hell, no," he said contemptuously. "Let's have the beer."

FARREL OBSERVED the few cars parked in the near darkness outside. There were no street lamps; the only lighting came from an orange neon sign on top of the building and another in the window of the general store down the street. Ecker's pickup was parked beside Farrel's old Plymouth sedan.

He stepped between the two vehicles and looked into the interior of the pickup. The keys were in the ignition. Ecker's

Winchester, with its mounted scope, was held by specially installed clamps along the front edge of the seat just above the flooring. The habits of a man, Farrel thought, were in direct ratio to his personality. Ecker was an egotistical bully, he believed that no one would dare take something he owned. As a result he carelessly left his car in this condition.

Looking toward the bar, hoping the extra beer would hold Ecker in there, Farrel opened the left-hand door. He leaned inside and carefully removed the rifle from the clamps.

He moved quickly to the rear of his own car, lifted the door of the trunk and placed Ecker's rifle there. Then he picked up a second rifle—same model with an identical scope—and closed the trunk. He stepped back to the pickup, pushed the second Winchester into the clamps, then softly closed the truck's door.

As he got into his Plymouth, he realized that he was breathing quickly. He drove away, regretting only the money he'd paid for that rifle at a large and busy sporting goods store in San Francisco where, he was certain, he would never be remembered. It had taken most of what meager savings he'd had in the bank.

But it was an investment that would pay returns—if it worked.

He stopped his car beside the small cabin he'd rented to house his family, then walked through the wet wind into a steamy kitchen which smelled familiarly of ham and lima beans. Milly looked at him reproachfully.

Her hair was in curlers—her permanent do, he thought dismally. The lines of her plump face—she was fifteen pounds heavier now than when he'd married her—were set in that vacant expression worn ever since Jolly had been delivered. Her voice came forth in a thin, high whine: "I have to hold dinner every night!"

"So you do," he said wearily, and looked into the living room, where Jolly was trying to work his portable crib into a wall by yanking back and forth on a top slat.

"Night after night!" Milly shrilled.

He walked into the living room and sat down in an ancient easy chair. Jolly saw him and started babbling loudly, shifting the direction of his manipulation. Moments later the crib jarred into one of Farrel's shins. Grunting with pain, he stared back in fury at the wet, wicked smile Jolly was showing him

Vince Ecker's redwood house, its shingles catching the last light of the following day, was in a secluded hollow at the north edge of the sparsely housed community. Farrel stood in the protection of a thick grove of trees above, watching the man working one of the shepherds in the fenced area of his dog run. He wore the protective gear of an attack-dog trainer and held a small leather whip with frayed ends, which he repeatedly snapped into the dog's nose. The dog, its eyes growing brighter, snarled and attacked with greater vengeance.

Farrel jogged a hundred yards back to where he'd parked his car. He drove to the crossroads and got out to enter a public telephone booth. As he dialed, he felt his blood warming. He let the rings repeat until he heard the breathless, angry voice of Ecker: "Yeah?"

He assumed a nasal drawl which he'd practiced repeatedly through the week. "Rawl, Ecker."

"So?"

"Forget bringing in those supplies tomorrow morning."

"Why the hell not?"

"He doesn't want to be disturbed."

"All right! Let him starve."

"Hurry it up on those dogs."

"That's what I'm doing!" Ecker said.

He returned to his car as darkness began enveloping the community. The macadam leading in the direction of Martin Brindmart's land ran south in dipping curves. Farrel drove in that direction, passing the ranch, then turning right on another highway. When he reached the small road at the rear of the property where Vince Ecker had brought him the night of the hunt, he got out and opened the trunk to remove the rifle.

A cow was sounding in the distance, but he could not see it because of the increasing darkness. He moved swiftly over the tufted field, over a rise and into the small valley where the raccoon had been killed by the dogs. He walked over another rise and stopped beside the small, wind-shaped tree.

The windows of the house used by Cass Rawl were dark; he truly hoped that Rawl was gone. The wide window of the large main house was lighted. Feeling his nerves tingling, he saw that Martin Brindmart was reading in the chair near the desk and fireplace.

Farrel lifted the rifle and sighted through the scope. His heart was bumping. But he forced himself to hold the rifle steady. His finger squeezed. The

report sounded cannon-like in his ears. The kick of the rifle spun him half-around. Then he looked again. Brindmart was slumped in the chair.

He hurried to his car and placed the rifle in the back seat. As he drove away, he was thinking that he might not have been able to shoot a deer, or a raccoon, or even a rabbit. But Brindmart was just another human being.

When he reached the edge of the community, he stopped the car off the highway. He put on leather gloves and quickly cleaned, then oiled the rifle. He returned it to the trunk, and minutes later parked in front of the Copper Lantern. He was seated at the bar sipping a beer when Ecker arrived. Ecker ignored him and sat down angrily. "Damn, stupid dog!"

Farrel half-smiled. "How's the hunting, Ecker?"

"Might be all right if they knew how to make rifles!"

"Thought you said that Winchester was the best."

"Tried it this morning. I'd have done better with the carbine! It was off a mile! Had to fix it all over again!"

"Maybe now you can hit a raccoon clean enough to kill it," Farrel said drily.

"Raccoon! I'm going for the big stuff from now on."

"Like what?"

"Maybe go up to the Sierrra and get a bear. Cat maybe. Maybe go down south and find a pig—I told you about them wild boars, didn't I?"

"Yes," Farrel said, and finished his beer. He walked outside and stood beside his car until another pulled away from the general store down the street. Then he put on the leather gloves again and exchanged the Winchester from the trunk with the one held by clamps in Ecker's pickup. He placed that in the back section of the Plymouth, on the floor, then drove down a winding road to Palo Alto. He crossed through town to the Dumbarton Bridge, where traffic was light. Halfway across, he stopped and leaned from a window to throw the rifle over a guardrail into the Bay.

AT TWENTY MINUTES to nine the next morning, he again stood inside the public telephone booth dialing Vince Ecker's number.

"Who?" Ecker demanded.

"Farrel."

"So?"

"You were talking about cats last night. I saw one down the highway."

Ecker's voice assumed immediate interest. "Where?"

"You know that little road that cuts off the highway just

north of the road to Brindmart's place?"

"What kind of cat?"

"Big."

"Wildcat?"

"Looked bigger."

"How big?"

"Five feet long, maybe six."

He could hear Ecker's breath drawing in.

"Mean-looking," Farrel said. "Mountain lion, I figure. Maybe came down from the north. I ought to phone the sheriff. Animal like that—"

"You leave it to me, you hear? I'll take care of it! Small Creek Road, is that the place?"

"That's it."

Farrel drove south, meeting a single car. He turned onto the narrow length of blacktop marked Small Creek Road and stopped out of sight from the highway. Minutes later Ecker's truck skidded to a halt behind the Plymouth. Ecker got out with his rifle held tightly in one large hand. He released three dogs from their compartment.

"Which way?" The sun glinted against his sun glasses.

"Down," Farrel said. "Through those trees, along the creek, toward the valley."

"Five, six feet?"

"Swear it was."

Ecker motioned his dogs ahead, and followed, running. Farrel waited until he heard them deep in the trees. Then,



from a pocket, he drew a bottle of tan make-up purchased at a variety store; he smoothed it over his face. He fitted on a pair of ski-type sun glasses. Finally he removed from a foil-lined carton a black parka and a white medium-brimmed Stetson. He put them on and placed the carton on the right-hand side of the seat of Ecker's truck. He turned the key of the pickup and backed to the highway. Then he drove to the road leading to Martin Brindmart's fenced acreage.

When he neared the small house used by Cass Rawl, his

palms had become so wet he could no longer hold on to the steering wheel. He stopped and put on his gloves. Then he forced himself to drive the truck to the gate. Through the dark glasses, he saw Rawl appear at the doorway of his house. Rawl glared at him; but the gate opened. Farrel drove through, breathing hard.

He stopped at a side door of the large house and carried the empty carton out of the truck. His worst moment arrived when he became certain that the door would be locked. It wasn't. He stepped inside and began looking for the room where Brindmart would be in that leather chair. After several tries, he found it.

He looked at the man—at what was left of him after the tearing slug from the high-powered rifle had created its destruction. Then he strode to the desk and located the lever beneath the corner. Paneling slid back. Farrel stared at the packets of currency stacked there. Finally, with shaking, gloved hands, he was able to transfer the packets into the carton. He looked around the room, feeling an increasing greed, and noticed a sheet of paper on the surface of the desk. He stepped closer and quickly read the beginning of the note.

To Whom It May Concern,
I, Martin Brindmart, here-
by reveal these following
events: . . .

He read no further, feeling a fresh panic. Had Brindmart somehow known that he'd been observed? Had Farrel been seen that night of the raccoon hunt? And had Brindmart written something . . . ?

Farrel grabbed the paper, folded it swiftly and slid it into an inner compartment of his wallet. He picked up the carton and returned to the truck. He did not look at Rawls' house as he drove through the gate. Through a rear-view mirror, he saw it closing behind him.

He reparked the truck where he'd met Ecker and carried the carton to the trunk of his car, where he placed it beside a small spade. He removed the sun glasses, parka and hat, put them in the carton and closed the trunk. He wiped his face with a handkerchief, then got behind the wheel of the Plymouth and drove back to the highway.

Following the undulating road, he drove fifteen miles south. He stopped on a turn-out in a heavily wooded area. When no other cars were in sight, he got out and retrieved the carton. He carried it with the spade into the woods. In a small clearing, he dug a deep hole,

fitted the carton down, then scooped earth back and smoothed pine needles over the surface.

On the way home, he threw the spade and make-up stained handkerchief from the window. When he walked into his small cabin and sat down in his chair. He was exhausted. His mind went entirely blank. Milly kept complaining to him. But her voice seemed very far away, and the words she spoke were unintelligible.

ONE YEAR, two months and five days later, David Farrel sat near a window of a large stone house. Encircled by a corrugated steel fence, the structure had a fortress-like quality and blended smoothly with the flat Nevada sage-brush land. Located well off the highway, outside Reno, Farrel could see nothing immediate but sage and brown earth and rock. In the distance, the bluish rise of mountains was fading in the wavering light of late afternoon.

He stood up feeling edgy; there were smudges of darkness beneath his eyes. He paced slowly through the silent house, from room to room, trying to find satisfaction in this haven and finding none.

He thought of going out to the front patio to sit for a while

before the cold night sharpened the air. But he decided against it, as he had for weeks. A bit later he would have to walk out to the gate anyway, to see if there was mail. That would be enough exposure. You could never be certain. He knew what a good rifle could do at five hundred yards.

He sat down in his baroque living room and stared at a cold fireplace. He thought back, as he did every day, to how well it had gone, once Cass Rawl had decided to go into Martin Brindmart's house and found him dead in the library. They arrested Vince Ecker two hours later. The next day a sheriff's detective had come to question Farrel at length. When Ecker's case had come to trial, Farrel had been required to go on the witness stand.

Ecker kept shouting his accusations; several times he had to be physically restrained. But Farrel had answered the questions in a polite, shy manner which, he knew, had suited the jury; his performance had been in complete contrast to Ecker's screaming and shouting.

"The defendant has made the claim, Mr. Farrel, that he was, in his words, framed—that you, in fact, fired the rifle that ballistic tests have proven to be the murder weapon."

"I'm aware of that."

"Is there any truth to it?"

"Certainly not."

Ecker, swearing, was in high fury, his face mottled with frustrated rage.

"It is the defendant's contention that you switched rifles in his truck, shot the deceased yourself from a hill, then tricked the defendant into trailing a non-existent cat of some description while you entered the fenced retreat of the deceased in the disguise of the defendant to steal valuables which might have been hidden behind paneling in the library. Did you?"

Farrel displayed a certain amount of incredulity at the proposition. "I've heard the contention, sir. I continue to be surprised by it. No, sir—nothing like that happened."

The cords of Ecker's neck bulged like taut ropes.

"You did not exchange rifles with the defendant?"

"I did not."

"You did not shoot the deceased?"

"I wouldn't kill a rabbit, sir, let alone Mr. Brindmart. I did not."

"You did not phone the defendant to explain that you'd seen a wild animal, which caused him to meet you at a location called Small Creek Road?"

"No, sir."

"You did not send the defendant on a chase after that animal, then disguise yourself in apparel similar to his and drive his truck onto the property of the deceased?"

"Certainly not."

"You did not see the defendant at all, that day?"

"Yes sir. As I was driving south on the highway near nine o'clock as I often do on a Saturday, I saw him drive his truck onto the road leading to the house of the deceased.

When his testimony had been completed, he'd smiled at the jury, then left the stand. He'd known fairly certainly that it was going to work when he'd heard the testimony of Cass Rawl.

"Please tell me, Mr. Rawl, are you absolutely certain that the driver of the truck who went through the gate the day following the established murder time of the deceased was Vincent Albert Ecker?"

Farrel watched Cass Rawl's eyes shine with the hatred of the devoted servant who has lost his master at the hands of the enemy.

Cass Rawl said, "Vince Ecker, all right."

He knew positively that it was going to work when the prosecuting attorney summarized his case by characteriz-

ing Ecker as a sadistic killer who would go to any means to accomplish his selfish mission—in this case, the theft of an undetermined amount of money, still unfound, because it had been hidden away by the defendant.

Ecker had put the finishing touch on the performance by shouting, accusing and raging in such a fashion that not a juror felt him to be anything but what he had been portrayed to be by the prosecution.

Farrel had hoped that he would be given the gas chamber. But Ecker had gotten a life sentence instead. That had been good enough anyway. Farrel had since learned that Ecker's performance in prison as a surly, hating, bullying, provocative inmate continually precluded any possibility for eventual parole.

FARREL STALKED into his library lined with every book he had ever wanted to read. But he had not been able to concentrate on anything these past weeks. He was nervous, feeling a growing fear of some unknown quantity which could destroy him. Yet he knew that was absurd. He had perfect protection here. He had not made the mistakes Brindmart had. He had refused to bring in dogs, because that

would have required dependence upon a trainer. He allowed his supplies to be brought only to the gate and left outside until he picked them up—nobody came through that gate but himself.

Yet, he had to walk through the open to reach that gate and collect supplies and mail. Each time that he was required to do it, his apprehension became greater.

He sat down and rubbed his palms over his knees. He'd also been thinking about women. Not Milly, certainly. He'd taken care of her easily, after Ecker had been sent to prison. He had picked up an easy brunette in the Copper Lantern, then began an obvious affair that had reached Milly's ears quickly, in that small community. She'd divorced him.

But, based on his book clerk's income, she had gotten very little from him. She'd remarried in a short time, and even that small alimony was no longer necessary. No, he did not want Milly. But any other woman. Yet how could he risk leaving this place to find one?

He tried not to think about that by repeating his most familiar thoughts: reviewing the possibility of having made a mistake somewhere. The largest, he was certain, had been

taking that sheet of paper from Martin Brindmart's desk.

He stood up again and resumed pacing, feeling his blood pumping. At first he had worried most about the condition of that money in the foil-lined carton. But when he had finally dug it up, he'd discovered that it had been preserved perfectly. Then he'd worried about demonstrating any sort of affluence by spending some of it. But he'd gotten the idea of moving to Reno, where he had claimed heavy winnings on small stakes, in the casinos. He had even declared the winnings on his income-tax report, and paid taxes on them. No one had questioned anything.

It all came back to having taken that note Brindmart had written. Because of the state of shock that had hit him that evening, he could not remember removing from his pocket the wallet which contained the note. But he must have, because it disappeared.

He recalled that he had demanded of Milly that she find it. But she could not. Finally he had looked at the moist, wicked face of Jolly, and realized that the baby had picked it up and hidden it somewhere. But up to the time of his divorce, he had not found where that was.

What, he asked himself, had



been contained in the rest of that note? Where was it now? Who had read it? Would it be enough to implicate him? And did Milly have it, waiting to use it on him?

He turned on a transistor radio on a shelf, wanting to remove that thought. Then he switched the radio off immediately. Voices coming into this house and telling him of the outside world had ceased to interest him and only made him more nervous. He'd also cancelled his newspaper subscription weeks ago.

He paced again, thinking of all he had planned to do if he should ever gain the seclusion and independence owned by Martin Brindmart. Now that he had achieved them, he could concentrate on nothing. He had even begun to hate his once-loved animals, which had become hated sounds in the night: Rabbits. Coyotes. Wildcats. Mountain lions. Prowling and searching, padding, climbing, causing him to lie in his bed with sweat beading on his forehead and his nerves trembling.

All he could honestly think of was having made a mistake somewhere, leaving a small gate open, something that would bring destruction down on him.

twilight, he stood beside a window and peered toward the highway as the red mail truck stopped beside his box on the other side of the gate. He watched the carrier, who was a slope-shouldered man with a reddish mustache, deposit something. The man had, in the beginning, tried to stall until Farrel came out to inspect that box. But Farrel would have none of it. Even now the man looked curiously and hopefully toward the house, as though Farrel might come out. Oh, yes? Farrel thought.

The truck finally rolled on. Farrel tried to get up his nerve for his daily forage outside. Then he walked to the heavy front door, which he kept locked and bolted—he well remembered that Martin Brindmart had failed to do that. He stood there, feeling a familiar weakness going through him. His palms beame moist. Finally he slid the bolt, then turned the handle. He pushed the door open and stepped out.

He looked across the expanse of white-graveled drive that he would have to traverse in order to reach the gate. Then he would have to unlock that gate and hurry out to check the contents of the mailbox, all of which had become a nearly unbearable task these past days. But his curiosity was too

strong. The mailman had placed something in there. It might be a bill. Or it might only be junk mail. But he had to know.

He ran along the gravel to the gate and inserted a key into the lock. He turned it, then jumped out to yank the lid of the box down. He grabbed a small package wrapped in brown paper, seeing that it had been addressed to him in Milly's familiar hand.

He returned through the gate, kicked it shut and locked it, then trotted back toward the house. When he had nearly reached the door, he was certain that he saw something moving beyond the fence to the east. He stopped, heart speeding. There was a clumping of sage there. Whatever it had been he was certain, had moved behind that protection. But the light, now, was deceiving. He broke into a run and leaped into the house to close the door behind him and bolt it.

He threw the package on a sofa, then hurried to an east window. He looked out, his face by the sill. But he could see nothing.

Imagination, he thought. Or something harmless, like a jack-rabbit. He returned to the sofa and sat down, not assured.

He picked up the package and looked at it more carefully to see that it was correctly

addressed. Well, he had made no effort to go into absolute hiding—he'd given a forwarding address to the small post office in that crossroads community. If he had tried to disappear entirely, it would definitely have been suspicious. She'd probably inquired of the postmistress, and gotten the address that way.

He tore the brown paper away from a flat pasteboard box. He opened it to see his wallet. He removed it, as a small white card fell away. He read the message:

David,

I found this when I was cleaning the house, as George and I are moving to much larger quarters. It was inside the register of the heater in the living room, where I guess Jolly put it, sliding it down a vent. As you will notice, there are only two dollars inside, which I did not touch. I am sending it not out of any respect for you, as you hurt me, all right. But because it has your various cards you were so upset about losing. I am only trying to be honorable, no matter how much anguish you have caused me.

Yours truly,
Milly.

He opened the compartment which contained his various cards. Then he looked inside

the second compartment where he'd placed the note from Brindmart's desk. He pulled out the folded paper. Had she opened that compartment too, to find this?

He threw the wallet aside and got up with the paper. He walked in a fast circle around the room. Then he hurried to his library where he switched on a desk light and sat down to read:

To Whom It May Concern,

I, Martin Brindmart, hereby reveal the following events, beginning with the decline of my partner, Albert Henshaw. It was true that Albert engaged in dishonest measures which profited him greatly, at the expense of many innocent people—as was stated in his suicide note found beside his body in his car where he died of carbon-monoxide poisoning.

What is not true is that he later filtered away those profits, as was stated in his note. What is not true is that I knew nothing of his dealings. What is not true is that he willingly committed suicide.

I discovered his manipulations, after which time I confronted Albert with my knowledge. By threatening exposure of him, to his wife, to his daughter, to his son, to his friends, I was able to extract the whereabouts of that money.

By working on his shame and guilt, I was also able to get him drunk, after which I carried him to his garage and placed him in the car. It will be remembered that a large percentage of alcohol was found in Albert's blood as well as a half-consumed bottle beside him in the death car. But Albert was intoxicated before the car's engine was started—by me.

I have since experienced an increasing torment for that deed. The money, first gained by Albert, is tainted money. It has made me a prisoner in this hated stockade I have created in these wretched hills. I have received nothing but hell in exchange. Secluding myself in this fashion—afraid, afraid, nerves nearly shot—I damn the money and all it has caused. All that I desire now, as Albert did before me, is some release from my torment. I invite, welcome any release . . .

The handwriting became nearly illegible near the end; the letter had not been completed.

Farrel continued to stare at the words. Then he stood up suddenly, eyes shining with fear. Milly had read it, he thought.

Yet—why had she sent it to him? Giving the evidence away that he had been in Brindmart's house? Then he nodded quickly, a muscle flickering along a

cheek. She was playing with him. Like Ecker, playing with a wounded raccoon. Sadistic. Devilish . . .

He whirled, hearing something moving outside. He ran to the window and yanked the cord to snap the drapes shut.

His mouth had turned dry. He tried to swallow and could not. Ecker he thought, reaching that absolute and inevitable conclusion he should have reached months ago. You couldn't cage a man like that; somehow, some way . . .

He switched off the desk lamp and stood in the darkness, shaking with a strong chill.

His hearing for any alien sound had become acute. Now he heard something very alien; someone running out there. He fell to the floor and pressed his cheek tightly against the rug. He listened, shaking badly, licking his dry lips. But now there was only silence.

Slowly he crawled toward the shelf where the transistor radio rested. He reached up and turned on the switch. Soft music played through the room. He lay shaking very badly now. The music stopped abruptly and a man's voice said, "There have been no further developments on the escape of a convicted killer believed to have fled to this area . . ."

As his hand jerked up to

turn up the volume, the radio was jarred from the shelf. It crashed to the floor and the voice was gone.

He pressed his cheek against the rug again, breathing hard, listening.

He should have known that he could never have defeated an animal like that. It was like trying to defeat a wild boar, as Ecker had so often described: you shot to kill, and if it didn't work, it came looking for you, tracking you, mean and vicious.

Farrel began to whimper, eyes hot with tears. He thought of Martin Brindmart's written words: "I damn the money and all it has caused . . ."

Cheek to rug, lying flat beside the desk, he envisioned the special womb he had created for it with his own hands: a trap-doored recess right there beneath the desk.

He heard that sound of running again, closer now. He whimpered once more, shaking violently.

Finally he rolled to his stomach, then began inching closer to the desk. He slid his trembling fingers along the grain of the rug, searching. He found the clasps that held the fabric flat, loosened them, then peeled the rug back. He

managed to find a key in his pocket and inserted it into a heavy lock built into the oak planking of the floor. He turned the key and lifted the trap door. He began removing packets of currency.

At last he pushed himself up to his knees, then to his feet. He stood swaying drunkenly, holding one of the packets. He staggered to the drape cord and yanked it. The drapes were drawn open with a thin, whistling sound. With his free hand, he reached out and switched on the ceiling lights, bathing himself in hard, white brightness.

Gasping for breath, eyes wild, he unlatched the window and threw it open, staring into the darkness. "Ecker?" He listened and heard nothing. He held up the packet of money and shook it, wanting only to be free of his torment. "Vince Ecker!"

He saw the muzzle flash. He did not hear the explosion.

Dusty, thick-soled shoes stopped beside the bloodied body. A stub-fingered hand gathered up the packets of currency. A pulpy, ultimately cruel face creased with a smile.

Minutes later David Farrel was alone in his house.

A SMALL SIN

"Gold is where you find it—except when a fool dares play with the devil's dice."

by HAL ELLSON



OFFICIALLY, NO gambling was permitted in the city of Montes, but—well, even the police looked the other way, shrugged and saw nothing. After all, a man had a right to dispense with his money as he saw fit.

So there were places where a man could go for an evening. Some were of dubious reputation, but the Widow's? Respectable was the word for it. Senora saw to that, her word the law, her rules simple and strict. No women, no swearing. . .

A serious clientele attended the nightly sessions: business men, professionals, politicians, a close select circle, with an occasional outsider.

Then the stranger appeared.

A man of thirty, he was—thin, pale, ascetic-looking and completely inoffensive. Arriving, no one paid attention to him; leaving, he went out the door with most of the dice-players' money in his pocket.

A stroke of luck. Back he came on the following night. Inoffensive? He appeared almost humble and had nothing to say of himself, though he admitted to the name Serrano. Again, his luck was fantastic.

On the third night the same; he picked the others clean and left. By the end of the week rumors and tales were spreading. The ugliest hinted at

cheating, but this came from a bad loser.

Skill with the dice he had in plenty, but more than this set the talk in motion. Senor Serrano was a man of mystery, as much a stranger as when he had first appeared. Where did he hail from? No one knew or could guess. To add to the mystery, he arrived on foot at the Widow's and left in the same manner, vanishing into the night.

Anonymity irritates, and winners gather envy. Tales spread; angry losers wove fanciful stories and outrageous lies, while a saying went among some of the better-tempered gamblers:

"Roll the dice with the devil, and you lose your pants to Senor Serrano."

Now, in a bar called the Black Cat, Senor Serrano's name was as familiar as tequila, if only because he was rapidly impoverishing its clientele. The Black Cat happened to be the favorite haunt of Victor Fiala, who sometimes gambled and most times did not and who was wise enough to avoid Senor Serrano.

"If he's that good with the dice, then he's much too good for me," he replied to a friend when challenged to an evening at the Widow's. The friend persisted, but Fiala remained

firm; he wanted no part of the devil.

No part? Not five minutes after his refusal, the phone rang at the end of the bar. Pancho, the proprietor of the Black Cat, answered it and turned. "Victor."

Fiala frowned. "Trouble, Pancho?"

"It's Lopez."

Another name for trouble. Fiala shrugged and went to the phone. Ten minutes later he was at police headquarters facing the chief.

"Have a seat," said Lopez. Then: "I know you're off duty, Victor, but I'd like a favor."

Fiala said nothing.

"You heard of Senor Serrano?"

"Who in Montes hasn't?"

"Have you rolled the dice against him?"

"I'm not a fool."

Lopez looked embarrassed.

"I was," he said, "unfortunately. The other night I went out to the Widow's."

"And lost your shirt?"

Lopez nodded, and Fiala smiled. "You're in good company. Everyone loses to Serrano. Do you think he cheats?"

"No. I watched him closely. So did the others. He couldn't have got away with anything. But that's beside the point."

"Which is?"

"Investigate him. I want to

know his real name and where he hails from."

"Is this an official assignment?"

Lopez shook his head. "Strictly personal. I'm curious."

"You think something is off-key?"

"I do, but I don't know what," Lopez shrugged. "Wait till you see him. He isn't a gambler, but the way he plays, like the devil's behind him. Another thing, he seemed familiar, but I couldn't place him."

"It's hard to place the devil, or beat him."

Lopez smiled wryly, reached into his pocket and drew out a wad of pesos. He pushed it across his desk and said, "You'll need this to pay the devil."

Montes is heavily populated, a growing city. Mountains ring it in; the valleys between are verdant, rife with corn, oranges. These same rich valleys open into desert country; suddenly there is a dearth of green, houses and people vanish in the thin dry air.

On the south road out of Montes, where the desert begins, the Widow's place is situated; an old ranchhouse with stuccoed walls that blaze white in the sun and gleam from afar in the moonlight.

It was ten-thirty when Fiala

arrived there. A dark night. His headlights picked out the few scrawny trees growing about the place, the pale walls. He braked his car, got out, noted the other cars—at least a dozen—and thought, Senor Serrano is growing rich. Entering the ranchhouse, he was struck by the scene—a dice game in progress, the players gathered around a huge table, most of them known to him.

How different they were from their ordinary selves, grim and silent, watching the one with the dice—Senor Serrano, whose face was a gaunt white mask.

So this is the devil, thought Fiala, studying him and frowning. Sometimes names eluded him, but never a face. This man he knew him from somewhere and couldn't place him. Senor Serrano sent the white cubes rolling from a leather cup. Across the table they tumbled, came to rest and a groan escaped the others. Serrano had made his point.

With both hands he swept up his winnings, picked up the dice again and rattled them, all this with no display of emotion, but with a look in his eye such as fanatics possess, as if he were willing himself to win. And obviously he was.

A man at the table moved aside, nodded and Fiala stepped

into the place made for him. Senor Serrano glanced at him and away; the dice tumbled from the cup. Seven! Another groan escaped the others while Senor Serrano calmly reached forward to sweep up his winnings.

The game ended at three in the morning. To a man, Senor Serrano had stripped the others to the bone. Slowly they went to the door, then out to their cars and drove off into the night.

Last to leave, except for Serrano, Fiala slipped into his car. A short way from the ranchhouse, he stopped, stepped to the road and looked back. The building appeared as a shadow. Soon Senor Serrano appeared. No car to carry him from this isolated spot. It didn't make sense. Could he live in a hole in the desert?

The dark figure against the ranchhouse was moving now. Fiala watched till Senor Serrano reached the road, then started after him on foot. Ahead lay the desert, with the nearest village seven miles away. Was this where Senor Serrano lived? Fiala quailed at the prospect of trailing him there on foot.

On the road ahead Senor Serrano's figure was plainly legible. A hundred yards divided the two men from each other. A long walk in the

desert. And for what? Serrano had committed no crime, and where he lived was his own business.

A quarter of a mile and the road sloped downward toward a shallow stream that had gouged its way through the desert floor and now lay deep between steep banks of yellow clay. Where the road met the stream, one crossed over on a series of rocks. Serrano did not cross the stream but suddenly vanished.

Stunned, Fiala paused, then ran to the stream stopped and looked around. There was no sign of Serrano; not a sound disturbed the silence of the night. Puzzled, he crossed the sluggish flow; the desert road was desolate.

He shook his head, retraced his steps, sat down beside the stream and cursed himself. The whole evening wasted. Worse, he would have to explain to Lopez—but what was there to explain?

A splashing alerted him. He turned and saw a burro treading the stream; a man wearing a sombrero sat astride the animal. Animal and man came on. Fiala stood up as they reached him. "Senor."

The rider halted his mount, touched the brim of his sombrero. "Can I be of

service?"

"Yes. Have you seen a man on foot? I—"

"This is a lonely place, Senor. I saw no one," the man replied. Prodding his burro, he moved on.

Disgusted, Fiala returned to his car and drove off. Montes was quiet when he reached it, a sleeping city. The Blue Moon, an all-night restaurant facing headquarters, was empty and echoed his steps as he entered it.

He ordered coffee and drank it slowly while he tried to solve the mystery of Senor Serrano's disappearance. How had he vanished so fast and completely? It didn't make sense. Over a second cup of coffee once more he tried to crack the riddle, failed and stood up.

Five minutes later he lay in bed, weary but unable to sleep, for he kept thinking of Serrano's disappearance and kept seeing the man on the burro splashing through the stream.

The next morning, Lopez sat back in his chair with a sour look on his face. "You lost Senor Serrano?"

Fiala shrugged. "That's what happened."

"Senor Serrano must have a fast car."

"No." Fiala shook his head. "He has no car. He left the Widow's place on foot, taking

the road toward Rosario. I trailed him to the stream and, *Ffft!* He vanished."

"He dug a hole in the ground?"

Fiala reddened. "If he did, I'll be there tonight to hand him the shovel."

"Good." Lopez smiled and lit a cigarette; his eyes followed Fiala to the door. When it opened, he said, "Just in case Senor Serrano vanishes again, you'd better hold on to that shovel."

The door closed abruptly. Fiala descended the balcony stairs to the shaded courtyard, then walked out into the sun-swept plaza. A long hot day lay ahead, but was it long enough to prepare a plan to trap Senor Serrano?

Slowly Fiala crossed the plaza. On the opposite side laughter rang from a cantina, someone was plucking a guitar, an under-current of sad notes and a soft voice trembled in a fading lament.

Fiala paused a moment before the cantina, then went through the door.

"Madero." The barman filled his glass; slowly he drank the brandy, three glasses in all, and left for home. His special chair stood in the patio, in the shade of the avacado. He lit a cigarette, relaxed, closed his eyes. The heat of the day and

the brandy was doing its work, numbing his brain.

A plan for Senor Serrano? He couldn't think, sleep was taking him into its own dark night. He struggled against it, heard a faint splashing and out of the blackness came a man on a burro. The man touched the brim of his sombrero—and suddenly vanished.

Four A.M. Fiala looked at his watch and shook his head. Where was Senor Serrano? he wondered, looking across the stream toward the Widow's place. The road was empty, ghostly in the moonlight, then, as if out of the dust itself, a figure appeared. Serrano?

Fiala leaned forward. The walker came on, paused at the stream's edge and from across the shallow flow Fiala recognized Serrano. Now, he thought, Serrano glanced back over his shoulder, turned quickly and hurried off, following the stream which began to narrow as it flowed between steep banks of hardened clay. In the moonlight his figure stood out. He was still moving forward. To where? Fiala wondered, and suddenly his quarry vanished.

Squinting, Fiala made out a dark patch against the clay bank. A cave? Possibly. He waited, frowning. What if Serrano didn't reappear? He

gambled, sat still and suddenly, just as he had "seen" them that afternoon while dozing off, a burro and man made their appearance.

On they came toward the crossing. A command and the burro turned into the tired current. Splashes broke the silence. Nimble the burro picked his way across the stony bed and gained the road that led through the desert to Rosario.

Fiala picked himself up. The mounted one halted and touched his sombrero. "Senor."

"The name is Fiala. And how much did you win tonight, Senor Serrano?"

"What do you want?"

"I don't want the money you won, so have no fear of that."

"Then?"

Fiala hesitated. "It's not my doing and none of my business—" He paused, shrugged, went on: "You must know that you've caused talk in Montes. No one knows who you are, nor where you come from."

"True, but—"

"As I said, it's none of my business."

"Then please allow me to pass."

Fiala shook his head. "I'm sorry, but I have orders from the chief of police of Montes—"

"To arrest me for gambling, when Senor Lopez himself indulges?"

Fiala laughed. "And loses his money to you."

"When one gambles, one should expect to lose."

"That hardly applies to one like yourself who always wins. Can you explain such luck?"

"I'm sorry. Now if you will kindly allow me to go on my way."

"Only when you tell who you are and where you come from. Otherwise—" Here Fiala lied in his teeth—"I shall be forced to arrest you."

Silence. Then Serrano whispered, "I am embarrassed. I can't."

"You must."

Silence again. Finally a shrug, then off came the sombrero and the one who called himself Serrano said, "I am from Rosario, the priest of the village."

It was Fiala's turn to be embarrassed. Padre Gonzalez. He recognized him and shook his head. A priest who gambled?

"I know," said Padre Gonzalez. "Allow me to explain. My church is coming apart. The stucco falls off the walls, the bellrope is rotted, the bell cracked. You see, the money was not for myself. Ah, I know



what you're thinking—a priest who gambles. Well, if I have sinned—"

"If you have," Fiala interrupted, "It is only a small sin, but that's not what puzzles me."

"And what does, Senor?"

"How you managed to win so consistently."

Padre Gonzalez shrugged. "The truth is, I don't know myself." Smiling, then, he leaned forward and whispered, "Perhaps God was on my side; and now I must go. It's a long way to Rosario and the burro is tired."

Up from the stream bank burro and rider moved while Fiala stood watching, a smile on his face.

*Only Clara Smith could have told why she
had murdered a complete stranger. And
she lay crushed under a subway train!*

**A Story of
Chilling Impact**



"BUT YOU DON'T KNOW ME!"

by STEVE APRIL



ON THE AFTERNOON she was murdered, Mrs. Eva Morris left her part-time book-keeping job at the Lunigan Meat Company at four, as usual. By four fifteen she was standing on a subway station platform Mrs. Morris lived nearby and always walked to the job if the weather was good, but at sixty-one she was far too tired at the end of the day to walk home.

As a train came into the station Mrs. Morris felt something at her back. Turning, she saw a thin blonde girl of about thirteen, in jeans and white blouse, staring at her with large, intense, blue eyes. The young girl held a shoe box in her right hand, with the handle and trigger of a homemade zip-gun sticking out of the box underside. The box end was open and the gun inside aimed at Mrs. Morris' head.

For a split second, as the subway roared into the station, Mrs. Morris and the girl stared at each other. Then the woman shrilled, "*But you don't know me!*" her thin voice louder than the approaching train. Several men and women waiting for the train turned to look at the two.

There was the orange gun blast; blood appeared over Mrs. Morris' thick nose, below her eyeglasses, as she crumpled. The paper box slowly started to burn and the now wide-eyed girl dropped it with a small cry.

As she started for the exit several men ran at her. The girl sidestepped, trying to outflank the approaching men as she raced along the edge of the

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platform. A portly man with sandy-yellow hair and a heavy, tobacco-stained moustache, reached for the girl as the others closed in on her.

The train braked to a screaming stop and then a sudden silence blanked the entire station. The horrified people gazed from the dead Mrs. Morris to the crushed girl under the heavy train wheels, at the thin, pale arm flung out from under the train as if in an abstract, pleading gesture.

DETECTIVE Bob Straw of the Homicide Bureau was a heavyset man in his fifties with a sour face under a grey crewcut. On first seeing him if asked to guess his occupation, you probably would say Straw was a head clerk, or possibly an assistant manager of a supermarket.

The resigned look could well be the result of all the years of hearing the same old jokes about his name: "Here comes the last straw." Or, "Are you the straw that broke the camel's back?" But any such impression would vanish when Bob Straw talked — his voice was harsh, cold, cruel and tough.

Now, sitting in the air conditioned detective squad room of this suburban precinct, thinking it was the first modern station house he'd ever seen in

the city, Detective Straw held the various reports of the shooting in his pudgy hands and listened to Lieutenant Harry Mancino.

The lieutenant was about the same age as Straw but looked like a dick: tall and lean, big hands and compact shoulders, sharply dressed.

He said, "We can close the case, Straw. As you saw from the reports, the deceased never knew this dizzy kid, this Clara Smith. Mrs. Morris was the widow of a butcher, had kept the books in his store until he died about nine years ago. She had no kids or family, lived alone in a one room apartment. She'd been keeping the books for the Lunigan Meat Company from ten to four for the last four years.

"As for Clara Smith, she lived with her hard working mother way over on the other side of town. Mama says Clara was a wild kid, always out of the house. Papa died in a mental institution. Most likely the kid was a mental weirdie. She's dead, so that wraps up the case. Just another example of our nutty teenagers, shooting a total stranger. Damn, you never know what these jerky kids of today will do. Nobody is safe from them."

Straw nodded his big head, then said curtly, "I'm not

calling the case closed, Lieutenant."

"Oh come on. A dozen people saw the girl shoot Mrs. Morris, then saw the kid fall under the train! What more can we do?"

"I'm bothered. In the second or two before the old lady was shot, after she'd seen the gun in the shoe box, it's odd that she shouted, *'But you don't know me!'* On seeing anybody pointing a gun at her, especially a strange kid, Mrs. Morris should have screamed for help, or merely screamed."

Lieutenant Mancino groaned silently. He knew Straw was a top homicide man, but this was obviously an open and shut case. He said, "In a moment like that, who can say what a person will shout? Mrs. Morris saw an absolute stranger aiming a gun at her, so naturally she thought the kid had mistaken her for somebody else. That's all."

"Yeah, that's what she must have thought. But she said, *'But you don't know me!'* I have a hunch Mrs. Morris expected somebody to get her but was astonished at it being a kid. Another thing, according to this talk one of your men had with Mrs. Morris' neighbor, the old lady had mentioned that she expected to come into some money soon and was going

travel to Israel. Could she have been shaking somebody down?"

"Stop it, Straw. Mrs. Morris had two hundred ninety-four dollars in a savings account, a couple of U.S. Bonds, received one hundred dollars monthly from a small policy her husband had left her. Her take home pay from the meat company was forty-six dollars and seventy-eight cents. She was a quiet type, watched TV a lot, only left her apartment on Saturdays to go to the temple. Does that sound like a shakedown artist? The money she expected was her Social Security. She would have been sixty-two in a few weeks, had already applied for Social Security."

"Maybe. But that would have amounted to about one hundred twenty dollars monthly, hardly traveling money," Straw said sullenly.

Mancino punched the air with his left hand. "She'd still be getting the little insurance money, meaning she'd have about fifty bucks a week, tax-free. Straw, why make a big deal out of this?"

"I don't know. But I still think she should have yelled for help. It's just possible this wasn't any crazy killing but a deliberate murder. Straw got to his feet. "I want to dig into this

Mancino shrugged. "Okay, you're the homicide expert. But I have a busy house here and I think you're wasting time over nothing."

"Maybe. I'll dig on my own. I'll be in touch."

It was seven when Straw left the precinct house and drove to the Lunigan Meat Company. This was a double store on the ground floor of a tenement, with the apartment above used as an office. There was a light in the office and Mr. Sam Lunigan was checking orders.

He was a thickly built man in his early forties with a boyish face. He explained to Straw, "I supply meat to restaurants and a couple of hotels. This is a highly competitive business, keeps me on my toes all the time. Downstairs I have my freezers, meat grinders. I have one butcher and two drivers working for me, help with the butchering myself. My wife used to keep the books but when we had our second kid, I advertised for a part-time bookkeeper. Eva Morris answered the ad and was the right person: she lived near here, knew the business from working with her husband. My God, I still can't believe the sweet old woman is dead. That Smith kid, why would anybody shoot a total stranger?"

"Did Mrs. Morris seem worried, upset, lately?"

"Eva? Quiet as a mouse. You know how it is, all my employees take home a package of bacon now and then, a couple of chops or a pickled tongue. But not Eva. She'd be here at ten, regular as a clock, do her work and leave at four. She was more or less on her own up here, but she never goofed off. Except for phoning down to the shop, the men rarely saw or heard her. Eva was my right hand, honest as they come."

"Did you know she was going to leave her soon?" Mancino asked.

"Eva? Leave?" Lunigan looked startled. Then he shook his dark head. "Oh, you mean this Social Security bit. She wasn't leaving." He hesitated. "Uh—Officer, can I tell you something off the record?"

"Not if it concerns Mrs. Morris."

"It does, in a way. I mean, we had decided I'd pay her out of petty cash. In that way there wouldn't be any record and she could collect her Social Security. I suppose, technically, that would have been breaking the law, but I wanted to help the old girl out." Lunigan sighed. "Good bookkeepers are hard to find."

"Did she ever tell you she

was going to travel, visit Israel?" Straw asked.

"Sure. It was her dream. She was a religious woman. But it was only a dream."

"We found travel circulars in her apartment."

"Yeah, Eva was always reading 'em. She was going to bank her Social Security checks for a few years, have enough to spend a summer abroad."

Straw rubbed his double chin. "This Smith girl, you ever see her hanging around here?"

"The papers didn't have a picture of her, I don't even know what she looked like. But Eva never had any visitors. Man, I'm telling you, kids these days! I—"

Straw stood up. "What's the best time to talk to your employees?"

"In the morning. We make up the orders, then the drivers take off before eleven. Say, do you think this kid knew Eva? I mean, she was out to gun the old lady down?"

"Maybe."

"If you'd known Eva, you'd know that was impossible. She didn't have a mean thought or—"

"I'll be back in the morning."

Mrs. Wanda Smith lived in a new low income housing project, a fifty minute subway ride from the meat company,

on the other side of the city. The apartment was spotless and cheaply furnished. Mrs. Smith was a skinny, work-worn little woman, looking far older than thirty-five. She was asleep — a doctor had given her a pill — but her next door neighbor, a plump Negro woman, was sitting in the living room.

She said, "It's a rotten shame. Wanda worked hard as a dress operator and to have something like this happen to her only kid. And no relatives, nobody to be with her in this time of sorrow. It ain't right. You slave for your baby, follow the good life and the rug is pulled out from under you."

"Did you know Clara?" Straw asked, voice grim.

"Of course I knew her. Smart as a whip, that girl was."

"I understand she was wild. Boy trouble?" Straw asked.

"Oh no, none of that boy stuff for Clara. She was a thin little thing, you know, not developed for her age. Now I have a twelve year old girl and Lord, she has a bust bigger than mine. I have to keep a strict eye on that child, or—"

"Was Clara wild?" Straw cut in, his harsh voice like a slap in the otherwise silent room.

The woman rubbed her brown hands together. "I wouldn't say Clara was wild. You see how it was; Wanda

didn't get home until after six at night. Most times Clara would be in the house by then, too. But it wasn't any secret that she rode the subways a lot. School kids get passes. Right from school Clara would get on the subway and ride all over the city. Like she was hunting for something. She'd tell my girl how she'd been here and there, always traveling, day after day. But Clara was never in any trouble."

"Did you know Mr. Smith?"

"No. He was already dead when they moved in here."

"Did he die in a mental institution?"

"That's what I hear and—Oh, I see what you're getting at. Well, Wanda told me several times about him. He wasn't a loony, he was a lush. I guess drinking is a kind of craziness."

"How long ago did he die?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe five years ago. A woman with a drunken husband, that's a hard cross to carry."

Straw glanced around the neat room. "Is there a picture of Clara here?"

"Well, there's some snaps they took at the amusement park last summer. Reporters wanted a picture but Wanda told them to get out. I guess it's okay if I give you one. You won't give it to the papers, now?"

"No, of course not." A moment later, studying a snapshot of an unsmiling thin girl in a bathing suit, the face long and bony, Straw said, "She sure doesn't look like a happy kid."

"You might call Clara moody. But if you have any kids you know how it is. Today they expect the world on a silver platter. Wanda always tried her best, had Clara dressed neatly, gave her spending money. Many a night Wanda would be up late, sewing clothes for Clara. Of course, by the time Wanda came home and made supper, she was beat, most times went to her bed. Maybe Clara was lonely but on weekends they did the washing and cooking together, might go to a movie. Sometimes, on Sundays, Clara would spend her candy money riding the subways. Always on the go, that girl was."

"Have you any idea where she got the zip-gun from?" Straw asked, heading for the door.

"No, sir, no idea at all. That shocked me. There are some kid gangs around here. Not that we've had any trouble—knock wood. But Clara never bothered with them. Even if she had wanted to, she never had the time, what with her riding the subways so much."



"Will Mrs. Smith be home tomorrow?"

"Of course. The doc told her to stay in bed for a few days, until the funeral."

"I'll be back."

It was after eleven when Straw reached his own apartment, but his wife had supper waiting. For the first time since he left the apartment, Straw relaxed, even smiled. They watched TV for awhile and went to bed a little after midnight. At six Straw shaved and showered, had a good breakfast and kissed his wife. He phoned Lieutenant Mancino for the names and addresses of

the people who'd witnessed the subway shooting.

Mancino read the list over the phone, added, "We were able to trace the box holding the gun. Came from some sandals Clara Smith's mother bought her a week ago. The slug was a twenty-two long. No prints on the zip-gun. It had never been used before. The one shot wrecked it. How are you coming, Straw?"

"Still digging. I'll be in touch."

Mrs. Susan Bond was a petite young redhead on the cute side. She told Straw, "I am—was Clara's home teacher. In junior high school the students have different teachers for the various classes, but they start in their home class. Frankly, I refuse to believe Clara did this terrible thing."

"Why?" Straw asked coldly.

Mrs. Bond spread tiny hands on her desk. "Clara was a very intelligent girl, but also—well, a kind of hustler. During her lunch period she'd do reports and homework for the other students, for a dime, or for candy.

"School work came easily for her and I think she helped the others not so much for money, rather it gave her a big-shot feeling. Her own grades weren't the highest, but that was only because she never

studied much. With a little application Clara could have been our top student."

"Was she neurotic?"

"Oh no. Clara was always alert and cheerful. In fact, for the past few weeks she seemed especially gay."

"Was she friendly with the other students?"

"No, not exactly. Clara was always a loner and—Wait, I think she was friendly with a boy, not romance or anything like that. Charles Parks, a younger boy in the seventh grade."

Charlie Parks was a gangling twelve-year-old, obviously nervous. Talking to a police officer and Straw's tough voice didn't help. "I wasn't going steady with Clara. She was just helping me with history. I can't seem to get history in my head, but Clara—ask her any date and she'd snap out the answer like a cram book. I used to give her candy and stuff for helping me but she'd help me even if I was broke."

"Did you give her the zip-gun?"

"No sir! I don't fool with guns or rough stuff. I don't know where she got that from. I only saw Clara during lunch periods sometimes. That's all. She never hung around when school was over."

Straw handed the boy a card. "Charlie, that's my name

and phone number. If you think of anything else to tell me, phone me and leave your name. Do you have a phone at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Okay. If I'm not in, leave your phone number and I'll call you. I think we both want to help Clara."

"Help—? Hey, you mean she didn't do the shooting, like the papers said?"

"Perhaps somebody made her do it."

As Straw left the empty classroom he'd been using as an office, Charlie ran to the door. "Say, officer, there is something I forgot. The last few weeks Clara was very happy and excited. Once, when I asked how come she was so gay, she said, 'I've found him.'"

"Him? A boy friend?"

"Not really. But Clara was always carrying around this beat-up old picture of a guy. Not a kid but a man, a handsome cat."

"How old a man did he look like?"

"Gee, he was real old, at least thirty."

"What did he look like? What color was his hair?"

"Hair? I think he was a baldy. But he had a big face and seemed to be laughing. I mean,

he looked like a guy who's

always laughing and clowning. I asked who he was but Clara would never say. But I had a feeling he was the guy she'd found."

LATE THAT afternoon Straw was sitting opposite Mancino in the squad room. His soggy face was full of tired lines. He said, "I showed Clara's photo to the men at the meat company; nobody recalls seeing her before. I've talked to the witnesses: they all tell about the same story but one of the witnesses is this big blond man who was nearest to Clara when she fell off the platform."

"You've sure had a busy day. As for the blond guy, remember it took about a dozen minutes for the Transit police to get there, more time before they phoned us. Probably a lot of other folks saw the shooting but left on the train."

"Nobody left on that train. It took them an hour to jack up the subway car, remove the kid's body."

"Okay, so they walked out of the station and took a bus. Straw, I still don't understand why you're knocking yourself out over a nutty kid who—"

"Clara wasn't nutty. She was a smart kid, a—"

"The smartest ones flip the fastest," Mancino cut in.

"Maybe. But I don't think

this kid flipped. Mama seems to have been more of a work horse than a mother, bitter about giving the kid the best years of her life and all that slop. So maybe Clara wasn't happy at home, but most kids aren't. Mama says she has no idea who the man is that Clara was looking for, and probably found. No sex angle, but there was a man.

"Another thing, I checked with the travel agency who sent Mrs. Morris the circulars. She was definitely going to Israel soon and ready to spend nearly twelve hundred dollars. She told them over the phone that she'd be ready to go in about a month. Where was she going to get a grand or two from?"

Mancino shrugged his heavy shoulders. "She had that insurance from her rummy husband, remember? Perhaps she was going to borrow on that. Or she found some money. Or she was playing the horses. Straw, what's the point of making a hard-working old woman into a small time blackmailer?"

"The point," Straw said sullenly, "is that she didn't call for help. I think Mrs. Morris was being threatened by somebody, therefore involved in some kind of deal. Not with Clara, of course. Another thing, some of the witnesses believe

the kid was astonished when the gun went off."

"What's that supposed to mean? You're holding a loaded gun on a person, you pull the trigger. How can you be surprised when the gun works? Listen to me, Straw—when a kid kills a total stranger for no reason, that adds up to a nut, in my book."

"Maybe. But there still are too many things here that don't jell, Lieutenant."

"Okay, you're the homicide man. What do you want me to do now?"

"Keep a tap on Mrs. Morris' phone and have a man watch her apartment."

Mancino grinned. "She didn't have a phone. And I have her place under surveillance. Anything else?"

"I'll be in touch."

"You keep in touch with your bed. You look bushed."

When Straw called his office the following morning there was a note to phone a Mr. Parks. Straw dialed the number, a downtown one, and a man said, "I'm Charles' father. Now look here, officer, I realize you have a job to do but so do I—to protect my son. Charlie told me something which may have some bearing on this mess, but I don't want him to get into any trouble, or have his name in the

papers. Can you absolutely guarantee that?"

"Not until I know what he told you, Mr. Parks. I'm not out to hurt your boy, only to find a killer. What did he tell you?"

"Well, when this girl helped Charlie with his school work, they didn't want the other students to see this, so they used to go to a park near the school. Charles said one day it started to rain and they ran into some bushes for cover, found a zip-gun there. Now Charlie didn't take the gun, neither did the girl. But after he talked to you yesterday my son went to the park—the gun was gone. He hadn't broken any law and I don't want—"

"Damn, I've wasted a day. But don't you worry about it!" Straw snapped.

In the park Charlie showed Straw where the zip-gun had been hidden, added, "Every time we were here, we'd look to see if it was still there."

"When you first found it, did you pick the gun up, Charlie?"

"I—yes sir. We both examined it. Then I put it back. I want no part of guns."

"Was there a bullet in it?"

"I'm sure there wasn't. You see, I showed Clara how it worked. You know, when you pull the trigger the big rubber band drives a nail point into the

firing cap of the bullet, acts like a firing pin. There wasn't any bullet in it."

"How come you know so much about guns?"

"From TV shows," Charlie said nervously.

"Now think carefully. Did you ever find any bullets buried around where you found the gun?"

"No sir."

"And when was the last time you saw the gun here?"

Charlie screwed up his face in thought. "This is Friday. I had a darn history quiz Monday afternoon. Lunch period, Monday, was the last time. Clara drilled me on some stuff about the War of Eighteen Twelve. Then, before we headed back for school, we looked in the bushes. The gun was there. After you talked to me yesterday I came here and the gun was gone. Mister, am I in trouble?"

"No. But the next time you find a weapon, don't wait to report it, Charlie," Straw said, his voice almost gentle.

When Straw phoned Lieutenant Mancino to tell him about the gun, Mancino said, "We've been going through the dead woman's apartment and found some figuring she'd been doing on a bit of scrap paper. She'd taken twenty percent of thirty thousand dollars, which

came to six thousand dollars. Then she'd written 'penalties' and changed the six grand to twelve thousand and five-hundred dollars. Then she'd taken ten percent of that and circled the results: one thousand two hundred and fifty dollars. I don't know if it means a thing but that one thousand two hundred fifty dollars would be what she needed for traveling."

"Twenty percent and ten percent?" Straw repeated. "Sounds like income tax. I'll look into that. Mancino, can you have one of your men take a picture of Sam Lunigan, without his knowing you are doing it?"

"I guess so. What for?"

"I don't know for certain, yet. Have a dozen copies of the photo made. I'll be in the squad room within a few hours, will want a couple of men. I'm going to see Mrs. Smith again, now."

Sitting on the couch in her neat living room, wearing a worn robe, Wanda Smith looked pitifully plain and drawn; a woman abused by life. Straw said, "There's one thing I forgot to ask your neighbor yesterday. Did you ever hear the name Lunigan?"

"Wanda looked up too quickly, then away.

"What's that got to do with anything?"

"Mrs. Morris worked for the Lunigan Meat Company."

"I don't know them; never had any dealings with them."

"Did you ever know anybody named Lunigan? Did Clara?" Straw asked harshly.

Wanda took a deep breath. "I won't have Clara's name dirtied up! I—her father was Zack Lunigan. He was a no good drifter. My God, I've worked all my life, was paying my own rent by the time I was Clara's age. And the two men I've been involved with were both spongers. Anyway, Zack was killed at sea. When he couldn't get me to support him, off he'd go on a ship."

"Not so fast. When did Zack Lunigan die?"

"When Clara was four. I never told her he was dead. How can you explain death to a kid? I just said he'd gone away. When she was older, well, the lie was already planted. When I married Smith, he legally adopted Clara, gave her his name."

"Didn't you know that all this traveling around Clara was doing, that she probably was looking for her father?"

Wanda gave out a weary sigh. "Of course. Lord, I work hard all day, drive myself, I'm exhausted when I come home. But with all her smartness, Clara could never seem to

understand *that*. She was always throwing up to me what other girls' mothers were doing for them, taking them here and there. As for Zack, all she remembered of him was his smile, his big voice, not the louse he really was. Every time she went looking for him, it was a stab in the heart for me!"

"What makes you certain Zack is dead?"

"He was in a tanker fire at sea. The entire crew died."

"But if he was a merchant marine sailor he would have been under Social Security; you could have collected support for yourself and Clara?"

"All I could collect would have been the only thing I ever got from him, a hard time!" Wanda said fiercely. "Zack forgot to tell me he was already married when we first met. Now you know!"

"Take it easy; I have to ask these things. Did Zack have any relatives here?"

"No. He was an orphan, same as me. That's what I kept telling Clara, but she went on looking for him. It's not a common name, but there must be over fifty Lunigans in the phone book and she went to every damn one of them, asking. Always asking if they knew her father, where he was. If I had told her he was dead, after all these years, she



bedroom with an old picture of a rugged looking, smiling man. Picketing the snap, Straw asked, "Zack's wife, where does she live?"

"Down South, near New Orleans. Zack deserted her and their three kids, too. He was an all-round louse. I've always been a decent woman, no matter what you may think, lonely and working, working—"

IN THE SQUAD room, comparing photos of Zack Lunigan and Sam Lunigan, Lieutenant Mancino said, "Not the same man, obviously."

Straw nodded. "Still, there is a kind of likeness: bull necks, wide faces, meaty lips. I called the Internal Revenue. Naturally they were cagey over the phone, even after checking my shield number and name with headquarters. Seems Mrs. Morris had been in, asking what the reward was for informing on a guy withholding income. That's where the ten percent came in."

"Informing on who?" Mancino demanded.

"She hadn't given them any facts, merely asking. But it has to be Sam Lunigan, since she was his bookkeeper. There's Sam, knowing she was about to blow the whistle on him; sweating. And along comes Clara Smith-Lunigan, desperately

wouldn't have believed me. I sweated out my life giving her food and a roof but she could only think of finding that bum!"

"Yes. He was a vain louse, sending me pictures of himself from Rio or England or Turkey. But he never thought of sending a dollar along, just his crummy photo."

Wanda returned from the

went to every Lunigan in the phone book; she went to Sam. I think he talked the kid into shooting Mrs. Morris. Probably said he'd take Clara to her father if she did it."

"But when he couldn't, Clara would have told the police everything?"

"Straw gave him a sour grin. "I'm positive we'll find Sam was the blond joker on the subway station, that he *pushed* Clara in front of the train after the shooting."

Mancino sucked in his breath. "Straw, I've checked. Lunigan hasn't any record. Are you telling me an ordinary business-man-type would go for a double murder, including knocking off a kid? That I don't buy. Hell, Lunigan could have paid off his back taxes, if he was caught, in time payments. At worst, if Uncle Sam could prove fraud, he would have done a few months in jail. A man doesn't kill twice to get out from under *that* little pile."

"If we knew exactly why people turn to crime, we'd both be out of jobs," Straw said. He glanced at his watch. "There's not many stores selling wigs and make-up; we should have heard from your men by now."

Sam Lunigan was in his office when Straw and Mancino entered. He denied everything

until they told him a clerk had positively identified his picture as the man he had sold a blond wig and moustache to, four days ago. Then Sam seemed to go to pieces, big body shrinking in the old chair.

He mumbled, "I swear, killing wasn't to be any part of it! I swear it on my father's grave! Clara was only to frighten Eva. Oh that nosey biddy! I told her I'd give her double the reward money, but she had to be one of these righteous citizens and all that crap! Talking about duty and ruining me! Then I tried to frighten her, said I'd hire goons to kill her. I don't know if she was really scared or not. What a mess!"

Sam's voice faded and the office was full of a dull silence until Straw asked coldly, "How did you get the girl to kill Mrs. Morris?"

"There wasn't to be any killing! The gun was Clara's idea!"

"Cut it out. The girl's dead, can't defend herself," Mancino growled.

"Officers, I swear it! The kid had been around, pestering me that I must be her uncle and where was her father? She used to drive around with me late in the afternoon, when I had a rush delivery to make in my car. I'd make the delivery and

then drive her up to her neighborhood. You see, it started because I felt sorry for the kid, tried to let her down easy.

"Instead of telling her I never heard of this Zack, I said I'd ask around in my family. She—Clara happened to overhear me cursing Eva out, to myself, I was that upset. I told her the old lady was ruining me and Clara said she had this zip-gun and what if she fired a blank at Eva, scared the hell out of her?"

Sam's voice died again. He looked at the two officers. "I know how it looks, letting a kid do your dirty work, but hell, I was in a bind, would go to jail if Eva blew the whistle. As for hiring punks, I don't know any thugs. Then I had this idea of wearing a wig, being on the subway platform to see what happened, protect the girl and—"

"Protect her?" Straw snarled.

"Yes, protect her! So help me, I swear it! What happened was this: Clara didn't get a blank but a real bullet. She said she'd take care of it but maybe she didn't know the difference. I should have done that part myself. That's why Clara looked so startled when Eva went down. I was trying to grab the kid, take her out of there,

for her own good—and mine—when she dodged me and fell in front of the train. Guess she didn't recognize me in the wig. That's the truth!"

Mancino said, "So you owed back taxes. That's not a real big jam."

Lunigan groaned. "Listen, most little business men take something off the top. Say you gross three hundred dollars a day; you make it two hundred and eighty dollars for the records, pocket the twenty bucks. Doctors, lawyers, anybody dealing in cash, does the same thing. May sound small time, but twenty dollars a day means one hundred dollars a week, five grand a year, if your business can stand it. Well in five years you have twenty-five thousand dollars.

"My trouble was, I was chicken, I never even took the money out of the office—I kept it in a special petty cash box. In case the Feds ever came down on me I'd plead dumb, pay the back taxes, but it wouldn't be fraud. However, Eva got wise to the deal because—"

Sam Lunigan shut his eyes, then opened them wide, glanced around the room wildly, said, "Okay, how can I be in any more trouble than I am? I'll tell you everything. The meat I buy from the slaughter houses has a government

inspected stamp on it. Now, there's always 'hot' meat around. Nothing wrong with it. I couldn't risk giving my customers rotten meat.

"About a year ago I set up a dummy meat company, rented a freezer out of town, started buying up some stolen meat, with my secret petty cash. Like I'd buy four hundred pounds of beef at the regular price from the slaughter houses, then, at night, I'd bring in two hundred pounds of my stolen beef, make up six hundred pounds of hamburger. Hell—"

Lunigan had been talking so rapidly he stopped to get his breath. Then he said, "Sure, it was illegal, but I wasn't hurting anybody. I started making a good buck until Eva stumbled on one of the phony meat company bills, then to my secret petty cash. Maybe she knew about the 'hot' meat and maybe she didn't, but once she went to the tax men, it would all come to light. My business would be ruined, I'd go to jail.

Look, I busted my back building up this business, fighting and clawing for every dollar I—Okay, it's over. I'm finished. But murder wasn't any part of things. You must believe that!"

Straw asked harshly, "You kidding? Here's what I believe: you substituted a real twenty-two for the blank, which was why Clara Smith looked astonished when Eva dropped. And you weren't on the subway platform to see what happened, but to push the girl under the train, escape in the confusion."

"That's not so! I'm not a monster!" Lunigan screamed.

Mancino said, "Mr. Lunigan, under the law I have to tell you that anything you say can be used against you. We're cops, not the jury. What we believe doesn't matter. It's what we can prove. We'll test your story for the truth, try to bust it open if we think you're lying. The final decision will be what the jury believes. Let's go." Mancino cuffed Lunigan's hands.



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INCOGNITO

new JOHN POND story

She was a queen, and queens know how to die.
And someone out there waited . . . waited . . .

by DANIEL FRENCH



THE SLEEK black limousine waited outside the State Department building. Gorgey, ramrod-erect, gray-haired departmental chauffeur, stood beside the limousine.

John Pond, American agent, emerged from the building with a strikingly handsome woman

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at his side. She wore tweeds and low-heeled shoes, but there was a certain and sure dignity in every step she took.

John Pond said, "Madame, I respect your courage, but I decry your determination to venture abroad after the threats that have been made against your life."

"Mr. Pond," she said, "if I am to die, then I will die. But I will not hide."

Pond stared at her, amazed in spite of himself. This woman, regal and proud, would be one to ride the river with. Queens know how to die, he thought. She'd scare, but no one would ever know it.

"We have been aware," Pond said, "of an enemy agent who seems to know much of what goes on. We are fearful he may have arranged a—well, unpleasant reception somewhere along the route we will take."

"Then let us change the route now, Mr. Pond."

"That will be done as an ordinary precaution, Your Majesty. There, you see, even I cannot be trusted. A slip of the tongue."

They reached the car and Gorgey opened the door and bowed very low. They entered; he ran around the car and in a moment was driving it north. John Pond calmly drew a gun from a shoulder holster.

"Gorgey," he said, "Take the next right and pull up. You're completely finished as a source of information to our enemies."

"Why, Mr. Pond," the regal-looking woman asked, "how in the world did you know?"

John Pond looked at the chauffeur with some distaste.

"You'll never really learn," he said to Gorgey. "Revolution or not, you'll always be a serf."

The woman said, "I—I don't understand."

"You will," John Pond said tersely. "My friend here is a middle European. You can tell by his English, which is bad, and by his manners, which are worse." He grinned. "Gorgey, here, has been taught to bow to no one. But he still remembers when he had to bow to royalty."

Pond lit a cigarette. "He hates you," he said. "But you are still a queen. He hates you, but he bows to you. And in doing so he told me that he knew who you were."

A couple of plainclothes men came up. John Pond nodded.

"Take him away," he said. "Just another mixed-up red gone wrong. And to the lady at his side, "Shall we go, Your Majesty? I guess we can call you that safely—now."

MR. WONG DISAGREES



BY
DAN ROSS

*She was rich, lovely—and quite dead.
And somewhere in that house of strange
hates lurked her murderer ...*

INSPECTOR BANNERJEE of the Bombay Homicide Division said, in his very precise British accent, "A woman has been murdered and a jade necklace you sold her stolen." The inspector was standing across the desk from Mei Wong in the old art dealer's studio on the fifth floor of the great Indian city's Empire Hotel. His swarthy bearded face wore a stern expression.

Mei Wong sat back in his swivel chair, a troubled shadow clouding his broad Oriental face. He had not been immediately aware of his friend's

entrance until he'd spoken, having been completely absorbed in the examination of a blue vase of the Ming dynasty which he'd been studying under a strong magnifying glass. Now the glass and priceless item of pottery lay neglected on the mahogany desk as he gave his full attention to the inspector's shocking statement.

"You are saying one of my clients has met a violent death?" He sounded shocked as he sat there in his immaculate white linen suit.

Only the whirring of a large-bladed overhead fan broke

the silence for a moment. Then the tall, ascetic featured inspector nodded grimly.

"Celia Mason," he said.

Mei Wong gasped as he heard who it was and recalled the last time she had visited his studio. Not more than a few months before. And it was then he had sold her the valuable jade necklace. It had been well within her means, since her husband was Thomas Mason, managing-director of one of Bombay's famous export firms. A dominating man, much older than his lovely blonde young wife and immoderately devoted to her.

Mr. Wong's pudgy hands clasped the arms of his chair. "What a tragedy!" he said in his quiet, rather toneless voice. "How sad for her and how dreadful for her husband."

The dark-beared inspector nodded. "He is in bad shape. I have come to you because I feel certain you may be able to help."

The old art dealer spread his hands. "Anything I can do."

"She was found strangled in her bedroom," Inspector Bannerjee said. "She and her husband had adjoining rooms. He claims he thought he heard her moving around in her room late last night but, knowing she suffered from occasional bouts of insomnia, he assumed she

had gotten out of bed to take a sleeping tablet. This morning he opened the door to her room and found her stretched out on the carpet, throttled with a silk cord from her dressing gown."

Mr. Wong frowned. "And the jade necklace was missing. So you assume the motive was robbery."

There was a strange gleam in Inspector Bannerjee's eyes. "The necklace which she had been wearing last evening and left on the dresser was gone. And a youthful house boy who Mr. Mason had hired recently has vanished."

"I gather you are trying to find him as the most likely suspect."

"We have a full-fledged manhunt under way. I don't doubt we'll locate him, though it's possible it may take a few days. This is a large city and we have a flourishing underworld. Undoubtedly his initial move will be to try and dispose of the necklace. Since most of the fences are known to us and not anxious to be mixed up with a murderer we shall most likely get a tip from one or other of them."

The old art dealer nodded. "And then you can close in on your murderer."

"If the servant is actually Celia Mason's killer."

Mr. Wong showed mild

surprise. "You suspect someone else? What possible motive exists besides the simple one of theft?"

"Several," the inspector said dryly. "We are dealing with a rather complex household. I'll need you to possibly identify the necklace and also for advice."

"What sort of advice?"

"You know most of the personalities involved," the inspector said. "I'd appreciate your visiting the scene of the crime with me. It is possible you may hit on something we have missed."

"I doubt that," Mr. Wong said modestly. "I do know the estate well. Thomas Mason invited me there on many occasions. And of course I was acquainted with Celia Mason and her sister Sarah."

"Sarah has been visiting at the house. She is there now."

"Then this will be very bad for her as well."

The inspector shrugged. "Since you know them, may I suggest there was no love lost between the sisters? As I understand it, Sarah, the elder of the two, was the first to catch the interest of Thomas Mason. Celia stole his affections and married him. Hasn't there been some bitterness and jealousy on Sarah's part?"

Mei Wong sighed. "I know there has been gossip."

"And now Sarah is apparently attempting revenge by trying to ruin her sister's name in death. The Masons have another house guests, living in the same cottage on the estate, Cleveland Wren, the big game hunter and mountain climber. You must have read some of his books or at least his newspaper articles."

"I believe so," Mei Wong said. "I had no idea he was here in India."

"He knew the Masons back in England," the inspector said. "And he's been their guest for almost a month. He's a handsome man and athletic for someone approaching middle age. Sarah Lane claims she saw him coming down the stairs last night in a shaken condition. She is suggesting he had been visiting her sister in her room and that he is the one who murdered Celia Mason."

"Did anyone else see him? And had he any reason for being in the house?"

"Not at that hour," Inspector Banerjee said. "And no one else saw him. Naturally he denies the whole business and puts it down to Sarah's spite."

"What is the attitude of the husband, Thomas Mason?"

"He refuses to believe his wife was unfaithful. Thinks the story has been made up by

Sarah. He has complete trust in his friend and guest, Cleveland Wren. And he accepts his version of things—that he didn't leave the cottage to return to the house after they finished their bridge game for the evening."

The old art dealer knew the inspector well enough to detect the slight frustration in his voice. He said, "But you do not agree?"

The tall, bearded man shrugged. "Anyone could have strangled Celia. The servant boy in order to steal the necklace, her husband in some sort of jealous rage, Cleveland Wren as her disappointed lover or even her sister, Sarah, because she hated her. Anyone of them could have drawn that cord around her throat tightly enough to strangle her. It's all so complicated. That is why I'd like your opinion on the case."

Mr. Wong rose and reached for his Panama hat, which had been resting on a book at the corner of the desk. "I assume you'd like me to go now."

"I'd appreciate it," the inspector said.

The Mason villa was surrounded by huge grounds kept in perfect condition by a staff of native gardeners. It overlooked the bay and was situated a pleasant distance from the city. An officer stood on guard

at the door of the high white mansion and let them in.

They first interviewed the grieving husband and Mei Wong was shocked at the change in the wealthy financier. His face was deeply lined and he walked in the uncertain, bowed manner of an old man. He had aged overnight. Slumping into a chair, he wearily gave his account of the previous evening.

He ended with, "It has to be the servant. This business of Sarah trying to complicate things is pure madness on her part!"

But when the inspector and Mei Wong interviewed the arrogant, lovely Sarah in the same chair she was just as emphatic in her views. "I did meet Cleveland on the stairs, regardless of what he says. I'm sure he's the one who killed Celia. I know she was having an affair with him!"

"You have proof?" the inspector's voice had a sharp edge.

She went deathly pale. "No. But still I'm certain of it."

The third person they interviewed in the big living room of the mansion was Cleveland Wren, the famed adventurer. Mei Wong could tell the death of his hostess had badly shaken him, whether it was because of guilt or because

he had been in love with her it was hard to say.

He stared at them in anguish. "I liked Celia! It is nonsense to say that I would murder her! She was one of my oldest friends."

"Were you in love with her?" the inspector wanted to know.

Cleveland Wren hesitated. "No," he said finally. "I had too much respect for both Celia and her husband to be guilty of anything like that."

With the interviews over the inspector and Mei Wong spent a great deal of time looking around the sprawling house. The old art dealer lingered long in the murdered woman's room and stood quietly while the inspector showed him where the body had been discovered with the cord tight around her neck. Wong then went out and investigated the balcony overlooking the garden which the late Celia Mason must often have used. It was small with a railing of spaced iron bars.

Wong went outside the villa. While the inspector was busy with a phone call the old art dealer spent some time investigating the ground directly underneath the balcony. After which he returned to Celia Mason's room. When he rejoined the inspector downstairs he had a request to make.



He said, "I wish you would have a search made of the estate for a section of strong rope. And don't mention this to anyone but your own men. You might find it in a garbage disposal can or something of the sort."

Bannerjee nodded but showed little interest. He was

far too excited about the phone call. "I've had word from the city. An underworld dealer called headquarters. It looks as if we're going to get our man. He's left the necklace with the dealer and is coming back for his money later."

The inspector paused. "I may as well drive you back to your studio." It was clear he felt the matter was settled.

The following morning Bannerjee seemed even more certain of this when he arrived at Mei Wong's studio with a satisfied look on his ascetic brown face. "The case is solved," he said. "We have the servant and he's confessed to the robbery. But he stole the necklace after Celia was throttled with the cord."

The inspector paused. "Sarah was right. It was Cleveland Wren who strangled Celia. He shot himself in the cottage last night and left a suicide note admitting he'd loved her."

Mei Wong listened with patient interest and when the inspector finished he sighed and said, "I regret it is not that simple."

The other man looked astounded. "Why do you say that?"

"I have a reason," the art dealer said. "Did your men find that rope?"

The inspector frowned. "I'd forgotten. Yes, one of them located a length of rope stuffed in a box in an outside shed."

"Good," Mr. Wong said rising. "I suggest we return to the Mason house."

They were all in Celia's room as Mei Wong opened the French doors onto the balcony. Sarah, looking ill and frightened and Thomas Mason, pale and weary. An officer held the sullen young servant in custody and Inspector Bannerjee appeared the most surprised of anyone.

Mei Wong addressed them as he held the piece of rope the police had given him. "You will note this is not long enough to reach from the balcony here to the garden," he said.

He then moved across to a closet and opening its door rummaged for a moment on a high shelf to turn and show them a shorter length of the same rope and a kris.

"I found these here yesterday," he said. "And I risked leaving them here. An examination will show you this rope matches the other and that the two sections were severed by a jagged cut made with this kris."

"What are you getting at?" Inspector Bannerjee asked.

Mei Wong turned to him. "I'm suggesting Celia Mason kept this rope in her room and tied it around the balcony

railing so her lover, Wren, could make his way up it to join her here without entering the house. On the night of the murder Thomas Mason heard sounds in this room and fearing it might be an intruder bent on theft, snatched this kris from his wall where it formed a decoration with a similar one. He rushed in here to find his wife waiting on the balcony for Cleveland Wren. The lover was already part way up the rope.

"In silence, Thomas Mason swiftly whipped the cord from his wife's dressing gown and then looped it around her throat with two long strands hanging down. Then, pressing the kris against her trembling body, he whispered instructions for her to stretch flat on the balcony with her head protruded through the railing bars."

Thomas Mason interrupted hoarsely. "What sort of nonsense is this?"

"Wait!" Bannerjee said.

"And now came the moment of drama and revenge," Mei Wong went on. "With Wren close to the balcony, Thomas Mason calmly went about cutting the rope near the railing. In doing so he gave Wren the choice of falling to his death on the concrete walk below or of reaching out and grasping the cords dangling

from Celia's neck and saving himself!"

In the background Sarah gave a strangled gasp. "Oh, no!"

Mr. Wong nodded gravely. "No doubt Thomas Mason enjoyed the moment. Perhaps Celia begged Wren not to save himself by grasping the cords hanging from her throat and surely strangling her. A braver man might have refused or found a way of escape. Wren didn't.

"When the rope snapped he grabbed for the cords and saved himself as he slowly throttled the woman he loved. The two men must have confronted each other for a moment over Celia's dead body. Thomas Mason was satisfied with his revenge and willing to cover up what happened to save his wife's reputation. Wren could not live with what he had done and so took his own life."

As the old art dealer ended his account the stricken husband of Celia surprised them all by rushing forward and with a wild cry throwing himself over the balcony to certain death.

There was a hush in the room; then Bannerjee said, "You might have stopped him, Wong. You were in the entrance to the balcony, Why didn't you?"

The old art dealer merely shrugged.

THE POTTED PURPLE PETUNIA

Sometimes the trail to Murder can be long and dark. Sometimes Death bars the long way back. But sometimes even a flower can show one the way home...

by LEE RUSSELL

I SWUNG our patrol car off River Road on to the next narrow street of Westford's clean but shabby downtown apartment section and hit the steering wheel with the flat of one hand.

I grunted.

"Every time I see petunias, I get mad!"

Pete White, my new partner—the new, fresh-faced kid, police-trained but otherwise straight from his father's farm—obligingly looked out into the early dusk. Window boxes of pink petunias lined the sills of the old five-story brick buildings we were passing. Here

and there old men or teenagers sat out on building steps. From the open windows came TV dialog and gunfire and, faintly, from down river, the ringing of church bells.

"Unless somebody, someday, sees these punks carrying out other people's TV's, radios and cameras, our little year-old crime wave is going to march right on until these guys retire or move up to bigger cities and bigger crime."

"Common makes and models, I suppose," Pete said soberly.

"And nobody copies off serial numbers. And these guys

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don't strike often enough to keep people careful."

I turned on Main and headed back along the next narrow street. "Westford's not really

big city. Bar fights, neighborhood squabbles, single thefts; but never professional crime. And now, where do these punks operate? Westford Heights? No.

here, where people have to work, plan, figure, save up down payments. I know; I grew up here. They even have to go on paying after their stuff's taken. You know Miss Willis, that little gray-haired lady over at the library?"

"No."

"She was the first. Went down to the basement washer and left her door ajar. I listed what was taken—camera got with two year's worth of trading stamps, toaster handed down by married sister, fancy lamp given by the library committee after twenty-five year's service—and I saw what was left: faded drapes, worn flowered rug, maroon plush davenport and chair and, in the kitchen, scoured pock-marked sink, stove up on legs and a refrigerator with coils on top that kept noisily going on and off. Seems we don't pay our library ladies very much."

The street lights came on and I punched our headlights. "I took in a road worker once, killed a guy in a bar fight over whose round it was. I looked at Miss Willis and I hated those punks worse. The expensive item was her month-old TV. She apologized for having bought that: 'One really ought not to miss historical events'. But you know what she was really hurt about?"

"What?"

"Some German short wave radio she'd bought second hand in Lake City to practice languages with and just paid Smith's to adjust the tuning on. And her potted purple petunia which she'd raised from a pup. Sent away for special seeds, watered, pruned—"

"Well, it takes time and caring to grow things," Pete said.

WITH COLLINS, my partner of seventeen years, retired, I'd begun coming in early to shoot the breeze with the day men, more my own age. One afternoon Pete turned up early, too, and came to me privately.

"Look, do you suppose I could see the file on that Willis shooting?"

I finished running my finger down the duty roster. I was trying to figure out how to get both my wife's and my daughter's birthdays off. Both came the same week.

"I don't see why not," I said. "But there's nothing much in it. Nobody saw or heard much of anything."

I had the clerk get out the folder. Pete sat down with it at the table and I went back to the lockers.

That evening, as we headed into the breeze along River Road, Pete was even quieter

than usual. I stared ahead down the road, dark except for barge lights, and missed old Collins, who'd always had something to be going on about. Finally Pete asked:

"Somebody did question all the tenants of Miss Willis' building?"

I braked as a dog trotted out of the shadows. "If you've read the folder you know I questioned them myself."

"I mean all of them. And from the angle the looter might have been one of them? And look around their apartments?"

I glanced at the kid, who was conscientiously scanning the dark doorways, windows and alleys on his side of the road.

"It was all in the file," I said. "We talked to the tenants who were home. Pieces of families mostly—whole families live in houses—but all long-time residents and vouched for by the superintendent. We worked the angle of delivery boys. No deliveries that day. That left the paper boy, a boy scout and Standard Bearer."

"Of the males resident in that building," Pete said slowly, "four were teenage or early twenties. They all had steady jobs, though."

I knew what he meant. Loans and credit are too easy got these days, and the town too small, for grown, employed

men to risk disgrace or jail for gadgets or extra cash.

"According to the file, however," Pete went on, "one of them, Miller, had been at the Tri-Point garage just three months. Before that he'd checked out at the supermarket. Before that, been a stock boy at Regan's. The file has him living with just an older brother, a counterman at the Night Owl Diner. How did Miller strike you at the time?"

I thought back. "Just a kid. Dark-haired, good-looking, full of 'Yes, Sir's' but cocky underneath. He's the one, though, insisted we come in and look around. Opened all the closet doors. Lifted bed spreads. Pulled open bureau drawers."

"Still, a drifter. And his brother not home late afternoons and evenings."

"Okay. So of that building he's the likely one. Who says the looter has to be living in that building? For the Willis case, okay—no risk of being seen on the street. But on that reasoning he, or they, could just as well be living in any of the buildings that had a looting."

"Not if the first one was unpremeditated. If a guy just saw a door ajar—In a decent town like this, wouldn't that likely be the way it started?"

Well, he had a point.

"I vote for Miller," Pete said.

"Well, you go right ahead and vote," I answered. "That's about all we can do until something breaks for us."

The next afternoon, as I passed through to the lockers, Pete was at the Willis file again.

"Think it'll say something today it didn't say yesterday?"

Pete looked up and answered seriously. "It might. And Potter says there's a new case."

"Yeah," I said, "I heard. That couple whose kid fell out a window last week. Cleaned them out while they were sitting day and night at the hospital. Even took the kid's silver christening mug. And, as usual, no prints and nobody saw anything."

The following day, the desk officer handed me the phone as I walked on.

"Miss Willis," he said, "from that looting last year."

I spoke into the phone. "Miss Willis? Officer Ellis here. Has something new happened?"

"Well, no. I was calling to ask you whether something—"

"No, I'm sorry, Miss Willis. We'd have let you know."

"Oh. I'm sorry to have bothered you again."

I heard her embarrassment in her voice. She'd phoned several times after her looting before catching on that she wasn't going to get her stuff back.

"No bother at all," I said. "Anytime." And I waited for her to hang up.

During the conversation, Pete had stepped into the room and back out.

That evening he wanted to stop to talk to Miss Willis' superintendent. "I could do it myself on my free time but she'd know you and you'd remember the previous interview."

I swerved as a cat scurried from an areaway. "You'll do nothing of the sort, on your free time!"

Pete's face flushed. "Would that be against the rules?"

I swerved around a standing delivery truck. "No. It's just that one man's usually in charge of a case and supposed to know everything that's done." I stopped there, for, actually, no one was working on these old lootings any more.

"But when did anybody last ask there?" Pete persisted. "The file shows only the first day interviews."

"That's all there were," I had to admit. "When the obvious was eliminated there was no place to go."

"Some tenant might have suddenly moved out, or got more well off, or something. Then there's Miller. Wouldn't it be a good idea to check him out again?"

This went on until, next lap around, to shut him up, I stopped before Miss Willis' building. The super, a good-natured, dark-haired woman, was leaning out her front windows, watering her petunias. She remembered me.

"Floyd Miller?" She held her watering can suspended. "Oh, he moved out almost a year ago. Moved in with a friend."

"You have the address?"

"No. His brother was going to give it to me; then he moved to Lake City and hasn't sent his new address yet."

"You see?" Pete said, as we climbed back into our car. "Two young guys living alone together now."

I started up the car. With Collins, summer evening patrol had meant quiet easy talk, ice cream, a beer or two and shared reminiscences. I began to wonder seriously if Pete, as a partner, was going to work out.

The next day Pete reported five minutes late. He swung himself into our car and just missed slamming the door on his hand.

"Look," he said, "suppose we located Miller's friend's apartment and got in and saw a German short wave set there? How many German short wave radios would there be in a town this size?"

I backed carefully from our

slot. "None likely. And if you mean Miss Willis', that one would have been long ago disposed of." I had my mind on the unusual number of calls about prowlers the day men reported receiving. This, also, was something new for Westford.

Pete still sat twisted around, facing me, in his seat. "But just suppose—I mean, a short wave would appeal to a young guy. He might keep it. The point is, remember Miss Willis said she'd just paid Smith's to reset the tuning?"

"I remember."

"So, suppose Smith's log their jobs. They're an old established firm. Founded nineteen hundred-forty-six, their sign says—"

I said nothing to that.

"They might have noted the model and serial number. Then, if we saw a set in those guys' apartment—"

I glanced at my watch. We could just make Smith's before closing.

In eight minutes we were there, inside their office and looking at the log which they did keep. And there was the entry—Miss Willis' name and address, the nature of the job, the charge, and the make, model and serial number of the set. Even I felt stirring of excitement.

"Come on, let's go," Pete White said.

But out in the car, my hand dropped from the ignition. "We don't have Miller's new address. The stuff won't be there, even if it ever was there. And we haven't one single fact pointing to Miller!"

"I know where he's living," Pete said quietly, "With a guy called Roger Block down on Founder Street, just around the corner from Miss Willis. They might still have the stuff from that last job, the couple with the kid in the hospital, and all the expenses their insurance won't cover. Isn't it worth a try?"

I put the car into gear. "Yes, it's worth a try."

Block's superintendent, a large, gray-haired woman, opened her door at our second ring.

"You have a tenant here, Roger Block?"

At once, her expression changed from annoyance to concern. "Roger's not in any trouble, is he? Not after all the trouble he's had, poor boy, this last year. Losing his mother seven, eight months ago—bed-ridden she was, but Roger devoted to her—"

"Is he home now?"

"Well, yes. He and the friend living with him now both get in around this time. Nice quiet



boys. They work out at that big garage—"

"Yes. All right. Thank you, Mrs. McKay."

"Now remember," I said as we climbed the stairs. "We have no warrants. All we can do is ask questions and look and go just as far into the apartment as we are asked."

"Sure," Pete said.

"We've got nothing real pointing to Miller. And no reason to think our looters live in this building either."

"There is one."

"One what?"

"One reason to think the looters live here. But I'll have to show you—upstairs."

"Okay. You show me. And it'd better be good."

We rang and the door was

opened by a small-featured, tow-headed boy about five foot eight who immediately looked scared. From farther inside came radio music, loud then tuned down, and the aroma of frying steak.

"Roger Block?"

"Ye-es."

I moved as if to step in. "We'd like to ask you a few questions."

He drew back, then glanced over his shoulder. "What about?"

I eased forward again and looked past him into the apartment. Dark blue upholstered furniture on flowered rug, white curtains, blue drapes, no radio in sight, portable TV on roller stand, popular make.

A taller, dark-haired boy appeared in the kitchen doorway to our left. We had arrived inside the door.

"May we sit down?" I asked.

Block looked around toward Miller's expressionless face, then motioned toward the sofa. I sat down and Block lowered himself to the easy chair facing me. Pete slipped by and took the straight chair by the kitchen doorway. Miller came to stand behind Block.

Miller said, "What's this all about?"

I took out my notebook. "Well, it seems there's been some hub cap thefts in this

neighborhood. You guys work at a garage and know cars. You might be able to help us."

This was going to go nowhere. I asked a series of meaningless questions and got a series of vague, meaningless answers. There was nothing suspicious in sight and these boys could legitimately object to any search. If guilty, they certainly would, and if not—well, we're supposed to be public servants, polite, correct and helpful, not harmful or threatening to citizens.

I flipped pages and pretended to study my notes. Then a crash of overturned chair and Pete White, calling back, "Steak's burning!" was in the kitchen.

We were all in the kitchen. The skillet, scarcely beginning to smoke, sizzled in the sink. Pete lifted toward me a foreign short wave radio set. The two boys broke for the door.

"Hold it!" I had my gun out.

They held it.

"Now over against that wall," I said. "Face the wall. Hands high."

Pete phoned the station. Our force is small but so is our crime rate and the rule is two never try to take in two unless help cannot be got.

Block looked back at us over his shoulder. "I don't see how you got onto us—"

Now that it was over, I was wondering myself. After all, the switch from a vague hunch to an arrest usually takes a little longer.

How did you come here? We never sold anything here in town and took stuff to the city only when the garage sent in for special parts."

"Shut up," Miller said.

"There was nothing to connect us, nothing at all—"

Pete picked up the phone and dialed again. "Yes," he said into the phone, "we've got them. Forty-two. Founder, apartment Four East. Bring it over."

When two more men had arrived and handcuffed the boys, Pete and I searched the apartment. In the closet of one bedroom, we found two portable TV's and, above the mops and brooms in the kitchen, a shelf full of radios and cameras. Among these sat a silver cup engraved "Billie" and a date of birth. In the second bedroom, dusty and airless, the closet and all bureau drawers but one were empty. That one contained folded ladies' things laid away.

"All right," I said quietly to Pete. "How did we come to land here? Somebody at the station is going to want to know."

"You remember," Pete White said, "the window boxes

all over, out front, in this neighborhood?"

"Full of pink petunias. Yes."

"Out front because the front catches the sun best, the sills are wider and people like to dress up the fronts of their buildings. But no window boxes outside the living room windows of this apartment. Why?"

"Okay, why?"

"Because the woman here has died and before that was bedridden. Look at the sills here."

The windows beyond the bed gave onto a court and, outside the glass, ranged along the narrow sills, sat a row of clay pots, one or two missing, containing dry brown plant stalks.

"So," I said, "Mrs. Block kept her flowers here so she could see them and tend them from bed."

I turned at the sound of the doorbell ringing. I heard voices, then a tapping of heels approaching, and Miss Willis, flushed and bearing a potted purple petunia, appeared in the bedroom doorway.

"You got it back?" I asked stupidly.

"Petunias are annuals," she kindly explained. "I had seed left and grew another plant this year."

The two officers herding the handcuffed boys had followed

and now stood watching from the hall.

"I covered the neighborhood," Pete said, "looking at window boxes on the angle that a looter burdening himself with Miss Willis' plant must be a real flower lover and might have a thing for raising purple petunias himself this year. No luck. I even went out on the ledges. Nearly got stopped for a burglar. A guy was pretty tough.

"Then I remembered courtyard windows. I poked into every courtyard and got chased out of three—and now look." He reached awkwardly across the bed corner and banged and lifted at the nearer window. It shot up and he grabbed at a tottering pot. "Look down below."

I replaced him at the window, leaned out and saw below, among weeds and debris, pieces of broken flower pot and

three clumps of purple petunia.

"The only real purple petunia in the whole neighborhood," Pete said. "Self-seeded and a match with Miss Willis' new plant. I already compared cuttings. No flower pots on any other sill in this courtyard. And neighbor women can probably confirm seeing a purple petunia here last year."

Miller's face had grown dark and tight. "You," he said angrily to Roger Block, "and your flower-loving mother!"

Block looked pale. "And who wanted to go on with it after mother was gone? I only wanted, at first, to get her a few things I couldn't buy before it was too late. That lousy plant! Done in by a lousy purple petunia!"

"Call it *Petunia Grandiflora Purpurea*," Pete White said kindly. "More dignified and grand-sounding. Then maybe you won't feel so bad in jail."

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He had found the door
to a dead man's gold—
but who had the key?

THE LEGACY

by
MARTHA HOKE

NEWSPAPER OF his uncle's death caught up with Horatio Jones in Hong Kong. He would have received the letter sooner, had he not been in jail in Brisbane for trying to sell an off-duty policeman a phoney ticket on the Irish Sweepstakes.

It was only a terse note announcing he was mentioned in his uncle's will. However, it bucked him up considerably. Horatio lived by his wits and not very well.

To his knowledge he was a sole heir.

Of course, his only acquaintance with Uncle Bill was a negative reply to a wire asking for money. This was sent on a postal card. Horatio was sure Uncle Bill had managed to keep his small fortune intact.

On the strength of his

imminent inheritance, Horatio Jones gleaned enough money for his trip to his uncle's hometown, deep in the delta country of Louisiana.

"Blood is thicker than water," Horatio reminded himself often on his circuitous trip home.

A flat tire on the second-hand car he had purchased, contributed to a late arrival in Circo, Louisiana. Quite anxious to know the contents of the will, Horatio found the lawyer's house on the outskirts of town and rang the bell.

"I am Horatio Jones," he introduced himself, maintaining a somber attitude, although by this time Uncle Bill had been heavenly bound for some eight months. "I understand I am mentioned in my uncle's will."

The lawyer looked at Horatio over his glasses. "Please come in, sir." He pointed to a chair. Then he locked his hands behind his head. He almost smiled.

"Just as I wrote you, your uncle's will does mention you. You may look at it at my office later." He cleared his throat. "You, Horatio Jones, have inherited your uncle's fishing camp." He fumbled in a drawer and brought out a key. "I will point it out to you on the map. Perhaps you will want to stay

there, as there's no hotel in town."

Horatio gulped and stared at the man.

"Fishing camp!" he said in a high voice. "I thought my uncle was rather well off. I am his only living relative."

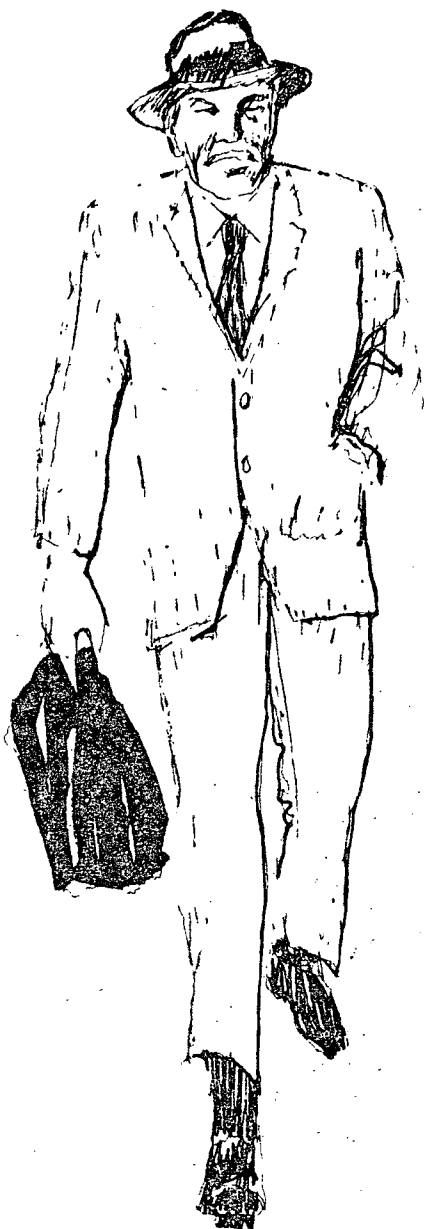
The lawyer struggled from his chair and surveyed Horatio coldly. "Your uncle was indeed well off. He was a very industrious man who traveled in hardware all over the South." He looked at Horatio shrewdly. "His instructions were that his money would go to an organization called S.H.O.A. According to his will this money has been turned over to them."

Horatio felt sick and looked sicker. "How much money?" he whispered, sweat popping out on his brow.

"Fifty thousand dollars." The lawyer shook his head. "I would not advise you to contest it. The will is quite valid. Eccentric he was but not insane."

Horatio sputtered, forgetting his role of bereaved. "I certainly will contest it. I will contact you at your office. Please show me where the fishing camp is located."

With some difficulty Horatio found his way amid the marshes to the fishing camp. He let the old car pant to a halt and



switched off the ignition. With his flashlight he could see a haggard, unpainted facade with tipsy shutters and a yawning porch.

He opened the front door and fought great cobwebs as he looked for a lamp. Creaking a door open to a store room, his flashlight stopped on the west wall. Horatio took a deep breath.

"Well, well!" he finally said aloud.

A cork board covered half the wall. On it were hooks, methodically spaced up and down and across, some half a hundred of them. On each hook hung a key, a hotel key.

Horatio found a lamp, lit it, carefully locked the front door, and went back to the board. He put his hands on his hips and whistled. His eyes went to the key at the upper left hand corner. Hotel Sonora, Gulf City. Horatio had been in Gulf City, a luxurious play place on the Gulf of Mexico.

So Uncle Bill had been a collector, a collector of hotel keys! Good old Uncle Bill had one larcenous vein!

"I beg your pardon, Uncle Bill!" Horatio offered aloud. He repaired to the front room, shook dust and spiders from a cot and slept.

The next day he rested and consulted maps and received a

visit from Uncle Bill's lawyer. Seeing the dust of the car across the marsh, Horatio was aware of his visitor long before the lawyer heaved himself from his car. The keyboard was locked up in the back room. Horatio was carefully repairing a shutter when the man appeared at the front porch.

"Hello there, Mr. Jones. I came out to ask you about your contesting your uncle's will?" the visitor asked.

Horatio put down his hammer and gazed across the marshes. "Perhaps I was upset at first, sir. But I am glad you came. I want to apologize for my behavior." He sighed. "Of course I am disappointed, but I am not a greedy man. I think I can become fond of this camp. I have decided to abide by my uncle's wishes."

The lawyer nodded in relief. "I told you the will is quite valid. I am glad, Mr. Jones, because court costs are high and the outcome might not be what you would expect." He looked dubiously at the unpainted shack. "I am sure you will find living here healthful. Good day, sir."

Horatio watched the dust recede. "Healthful it will be, my friend," he said aloud. Not a bad place to stay with some repairs and enough money to make it in to the races in New

Orleans. He allowed in a few years he would realize the fifty thousand dollars in loot without taxes and court costs.

In a few days he set out to seek his fortune with a dozen appropriate keys in his brief case. Cash, maybe, he thought, but mainly jewelry, clothes and personal items which could be turned into money, concerned him most. He had lined up half a dozen towns along the Gulf Coast where there would be no vacancies and a golfing, playing guest list.

At the Hotel Sonora at Gulf City in room ten, Horatio did very well. Reading a paper at the end of the corridor, Horatio watched a plump man and his equally plump wife lug golf clubs from the room. His loot here was fifty dollars hidden in a train case, a very respectable amount of costume jewelry, and some rather expensive men's clothing, size forty-four short. He also managed to remove the portable television set to the car through the side entrance. Humming, he headed East to his next venture.

However, at the Gulf Oasis, he came upon a chambermaid in room thirty, but was none the worse off for this encounter. He left before she could look around.

All in all he felt he had done well in the ten hotels he visited.

He returned to the fishing camp with quite a lot of money, half a dozen television sets, men's and women's clothing, and various jewelry, some of it rather good. Storing it in the back room, Horatio locked the door and went to the front porch with a bottle of Scotch he had picked up at the Alamis Hotel three days before. He drank a silent toast to Uncle Bill and lit a cigar he had exported from room forty-five at the Sea Scape that afternoon.

The next day he rested, consulted maps, and went to town for groceries. On the way back he found himself dreaming of years of plenty. It was entirely premature.

Turning the corner into the camp he came upon a little man awaiting him on the front porch. Busybody from town, Horatio decided. He had not been seen on his ventures and the expression on his face was disarmingly innocent. Horatio drove close to the house, got out of his car and stood near it.

"How do you do?" he asked politely. "What may I do for you?"

The little man crossed his seersucker knees.

"Mr. Jones?" he asked, and when Horatio nodded, he cleared his throat and said, "My name is Henry Clinton. I am president of the organization

S.H.O.A. to whom your uncle left his money."

Horatio was becoming exasperated. "Mr. Clinton, I have informed Uncle Bill's lawyer that I will not contest the will. You and your organization may rest easy. The fifty thousand dollars belongs to you. Isn't that enough?"

Mr. Clinton shook his head and stared somberly at Horatio. Finally he said, "The lawyer informed us of your decision. No, Mr. Jones. It is not enough!"

"What do you mean?"

"I do not think you understand the reason for the fifty thousand dollar donation. Have you seen the will?"

"Not yet, but it's hardly necessary as long as I do not intend to contest it."

"I am president of the Small Hotel Owner's Association, in short S.H.O.A."

Horatio pushed his hat to the back of his head and stared intently at the little man, who went on.

"We are an organization of fifty hotel owners whose establishments your uncle visited at some time during his life. He explained in a letter which I received after his death, that during this time he had deliberately and literally col-

lected keys from each one of us after staying at our hotels. He collected keys, as you know, Mr. Jones, like some people collect stamps. However, before he died he had an attack of remorse. He left each one of us a thousand dollars as compensation."

"But . . . but . . ." Horatio leaned limply against the old car.

"Just a minute, Mr. Jones. I haven't finished. Your uncle visited each of us many times. However, we could hardly put new locks on each door. Many people take keys and forget to return them. He only wanted one key from each hotel. We considered his donation adequate and chose to regard him as an eccentric collector. For the eight months since his death we have had no trouble until you arrived. The lawyer told us you will not contest the will. We are aware of the reason you will not do so."

Mr. Clinton coughed loudly. Two out-size deputy sheriffs came lumbering around the house. They looked very businesslike.

"We have a search warrant," Mr. Clinton said gently. "Would you be kind enough to lead us to your most important legacy?"



TOO MANY KILOWATTS

Hope dies hard, he told himself. But—men die easy!

by
HOLLIS DANVERS

HAD BART STEVENS not been a curious-minded young man, or had he not chosen to take an after-breakfast stroll with his dog that Sunday, he'd

never have learned what a dangerous situation a \$12.60 light bill could develop.

As it was, he strolled east across his deep-carpeted lawn,

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shaded by towering oaks and pecans. Lisa, brown and shaggy, half cocker and half pot-luck, ran a poor second in a race with a squirrel.

Following the Murdock's driveway, they turned north, Bart anticipating the delight of an afternoon of golf, Lisa sweeping the adjacent lawns as a setter hunts a field.

At the corner, on the left, a for-sale sign stabbed the lawn of the Early American bungalow of Fred and Betty Stinson who, having built a new home, had recently moved.

Lisa made a passing sniff at a post card that lay on the grass next to the curb. Idly, Bart picked it up, intending to toss it into the trash barrel after circling the block. He started to stick it into his pocket, but it was wet from the morning dew.

Then he paused, his attention arrested. It wasn't a post card; it was a residential electric bill, a yellow computer card, punched on an IBM machine and represented a debt of \$12.60.

Bart's accountant's curiosity was aroused. The card had been mailed five days before to Luke C. Corbin, 224 S. Plaza, Venturi, Oklahoma. How would a current light bill issued in Venturi, Oklahoma, get down here eighty miles away in another state? He frowned

thoughtfully, looking up at the uncut lawn which already was giving the house a deserted look.

He started to move on but paused again. The living-room drapes, which had been kept closed since the Stinsons moved, were partly drawn. Bart thought he saw somebody inside move. Probably only a reflection in the picture window. Or maybe somebody had bought the place.

Shrugging, he whistled for Lisa and resumed his walk, still holding the damp card. He would show it to Helen. She not only knew everything that happened in the neighborhood, but was exceptionally good at working puzzles. But if they had sold the house, why was the for-sale sign still posted on the lawn?

Inside the living room, a small bald-headed man stood near the open drapes. A washed-out blonde, a head taller and ten pounds heavier, was standing in the hall doorway. Her voice grated.

"What're you tryin' to do—get that pasty face mentally photographed by every crumb in the block?"

The man held up a hand and said, "It's that kook walkin' his dog again." Then he whirled, his black eyes burning. "An' if he just picked up what I think

he did, I'll beat some brains into that thick head of yours!"

He swept across the room. "Get in the car!" He gave her a push. "Like we're goin' to the store. Move! An' keep your big mouth closed!"

They raced out through the kitchen and into the garage. He kicked the engine into life and backed out, purposely blocking the walk just as Bart came up. Then he eased out into the street and drove off in the opposite direction.

The blonde said, "What—"

"Shut up an' let me think. He's got it!"

After they had gone around the block and were back inside the house, the blonde lost her patience. "*He's got what?*"

"Your passport to the pen—that damn light bill you forgot to mail before we left. He had it in his hand. You been carrin' it around in that two-bucket handbag of yours, an' the night the broker showed us the house, you dug for cigarettes. That's right where we parked, an' it's been layin' there ever since. Now, look after things till Ned shows. I got to do some checkin'."

Around the corner, Bart waited for the black car to back out of the Stinson garage. The small man was driving. He looked to be thirtyish, with sharp, pallid features. Beside

him was the large blonde of indeterminate age. It struck Bart as they drove away that they appeared more than casually interested in his presence. He noted that the car bore an Oklahoma license plate—2-1174.

Then, remembering the light bill which he still held, he quickened his pace, conscious of a small feeling of guilt, as if he had been caught snooping.

At home his wife, Helen, was busy in the kitchen. Lisa skidded on the vinyl floor in her eagerness to announce their return. As Bart poured two cups of coffee, he tossed the utility bill on the formica table and he and Helen sat down.

"You're good at riddles," he said lightly. "What do you make of that?"

Helen sipped her coffee absently, her green eyes studying the card. She slid it back. "Where'd you get it?"

He told her, mentioning the questionable movement in the living room and the departure of the car with its occupants. "Its being there is probably only coincidence, maybe blown there by the wind."

Helen's eyes widened. "All the way from Oklahoma? I don't want to be dramatic, but that's not the only coincidence." She reached to the counter for the morning news-

paper, turned a page and added, "I thought the name Venturi rang a bell. Day before yesterday, little Kathy Turner was kidnaped from that town."

Bart read the account. "Nothing since a printed note demanding two hundred thousand dollars. George Turner builds airplanes." He lit his pipe and relaxed. "Pure coincidence."

"The Stinsons must have sold the house."

"A for-sale sign is still on the lawn, but I'll call Fred." He checked information for the new number and dialed. As Bart listened, Helen's interest sharpened. Finally, Bart asked, "Was it Luke C. Corbin of Venturi, Oklahoma?" Another long delay, then, "Thanks. Come to see us."

He dropped the receiver into the cradle. "They didn't sell it. They rented it, partly furnished, for two months to a Herbert Walthers of Tulsa. That seems to settle that."

Helen was still serious and a little vexed. "I don't see that it settles anything. How do either we or Fred know that any Herbert Walthers even exists—at Tulsa or anywhere else? This thing may be remote, Bart, but it could be important. I think we owe it to that poor Turner family to call the FBI."

"Oh, honey—hell—"

"All right—oh, honey, hell, but little Kathy isn't your daughter." She got up from the table and moved toward the living room. "I'm sorry, Bart. Sometimes my imagination won't quit. Enjoy your golf, but don't play the nineteenth hole too long. We're invited to the Murdocks for seafood gumbo at seven, you know."

Lisa followed her out of the kitchen. Bart took his golf clothes and drove to the club, but despite his assumed indifference, his mind wasn't on golf. It spun with conflicting thoughts all during the game.

What if Helen were right? She was a pretty level-headed young woman, not prone to fantasy. Even later, while dressing for the dinner with Ben and Anna Murdock, he couldn't throw off the nagging guilt that perhaps he should act.

Being close friends, the evening was fun, though lacking some of its usual open gaiety. Bart was too quiet, a mood leveled somewhat by the drinks but in no way lost to his wife.

She sensed his preoccupation and felt relief when the evening was over and they could leave.

Halfway back across the lawn, Lisa growled and came to a rigid point. Bart gave Helen's arm a little pressure of warning

and spoke softly. "Don't turn your head—just keep walking. I think there's somebody in the trees toward the Stinson house." Then loudly, "Come on, Lisa! Here we go!" Lisa broke her stance, and they went around the house to the back door.

Relieved to be home but still uneasy, Helen started for the bedroom but quickly returned, her eyes wide. "We've had visitors. Come in the den." She led the way down the hall. Pointing to an open window, she added, "There, look at that!"

"Why honey, that window stays open most of the time."

"I know that, but it doesn't punch holes in the screen most of the time. Look for yourself and don't try to placate me. That screen had been unhooked and someone has climbed in—*tonight!* Look at the dirt on the casement and sill. I'm a better housekeeper than that."

Bart couldn't argue. She was right. "Anything missing?"

"Not that I can see, but did you take the Venturi light bill from the desk?"

"No."

"Neither did I, but it's gone."

"Do you think anybody would take such a chance for a mere light bill?"

"What chance! Our nearest

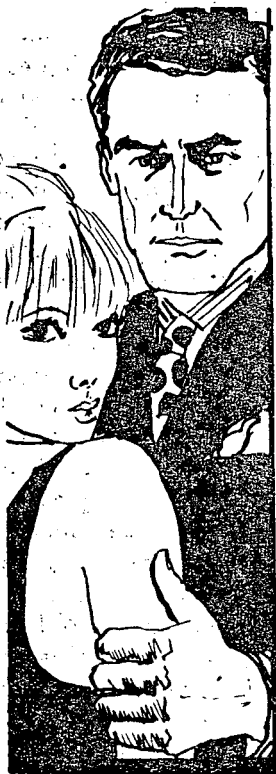
neighbor is three hundred feet away, and we were there for three hours tonight. To make it still easier, Lisa was with us." Her brow furrowed. "The significance of the thing is that they did it at all. How would anybody know we had the bill?"

"I guess they saw me pick it up in front of the house. That may also explain their pointed interest in me as they left. I had the card in my hand as they backed out."

"It explains a lot, particularly if they want to avoid publicizing the Corbin name and the Venturi address. It's frightening. If they went to this extreme to recover the card, what'll they do if they find out what we're thinking. I'm scared."

"I'm not buoyantly gay myself." He sat down at the desk and reached for the phone directory. "One thing is for sure. I have to get off my duff and get my nose wet." He dialed the FBI, and getting a prompt connection, gave the agent a detailed report. "That's correct. Oklahoma license 2-1174 . . . Good . . . Thank you."

Helen's eyes asked questions. Bart looked thoughtfully at the telephone. "Your hunch was right. They already had a lead on the car but not the license



number and, of course, not the Stinson address." He stood up hesitantly. "Keep Lisa here. I'm going to do a little snooping."

Helen Stevens knew her husband. Her frightened eyes said, *Don't be a fool.* Her choked voice said, "Be careful."

Bart circled the west end of the house through the carport and stopped. The silence of the still night was unbroken. The expanse of lawn lay mottled by

the light of a quarter moon, but beneath the larger trees, the blackness was impenetrable. Nothing moved. Keeping to the shadows, Bart crossed noiselessly to a point short of the Stinson house and again stopped.

A faint yellow light glowed through the curtains of the rear bedroom. The long play room, like the rest of the house, was totally dark. He cut over to the garage and peered through a rear window. The car was gone.

With an impulsive jerk, the kitchen door flew open. Bart crouched behind a hedge as a large, heavy-set man stepped out into the semi-darkness. A flashlight clicked on, made a quick circular sweep, then went off. When the man went back inside, Bart waited a safe time, then crept over to the bedroom window. Although the light was still on, the curtains were drawn too securely to see into the room.

He moved on past the playroom door and turned the corner of the wing to the far side of the house. Neither light nor sound penetrated the dark walls. The wide lawn under the trees was as eerie as a graveyard.

Then a siege of barking violated the silence. Bart wheeled in time to see the white Impala sweep out of his circular drive and roar away in a

haze of dust. Lisa tore after it in hot pursuit.

In an instant, Bart knew what was happening. He reacted automatically. His face stung with rage as he raced to the house, stopping only long enough to confirm his fears. The back door stood open—Helen was gone.

Bart didn't own a gun but he did own a pick handle. He grabbed it from the tool room and without caution made it back to the shadows behind the Stinson house in time to hear and see the last of a sharp conference. The car stood without lights on the side street, the engine running.

Outside the dark void of the open kitchen door, the big man had Helen's arms locked solidly behind her back. She struggled futilely to break free, a gag cruelly binding her mouth.

Lisa was giving all the trouble a small dog could give, but it wasn't much. Facing them were the small man and the blonde woman Bart had seen in the car. The man was speaking, completing orders in a high-pitched voice.

"Now listen, Ned. Lock this one in with the other one. Then go get that guy. He wasn't there but he will be and we can't gamble on them popping off. We'll be back before daylight." As the couple hustled to the

car, Ned marshalled Helen inside and closed the door.

Lisa, sensing Bart's presence, came over and whimpered at his feet.

The final words had made it possible for Bart to control the impulse to rush in swinging. Their leaving completed the return of some semblance of common sense.

By crossing a state line with a kidnap victim, these people now faced a possible death sentence. They wouldn't have hesitated to shoot to kill, and at that range, three guns would have been considerably more effective than one pick handle. Now there was only one gun, and a plan began to form in Bart's mind. For a short time, at least, Ned would have his hands full.

Helen was no shrinking violet; she was a vigorous, wiry woman and she was mad, and until he got her ankles bound, he stood a damned good chance of getting his teeth kicked out.

Yes, there was enough time if—and it was a big if. Fred had always kept an emergency key to the playroom door hanging on a nail in the garage. If it was still there, his plan might work. If not, the only thing left was to sweat out the arrival of the FBI. A glance at the radio light dial of his watch showed that it

had been less than a half hour since his call.

In the garage, he ran his hand along the end of the work bench, his chest pounding. It was there! Still hoping for time, he rushed to the playroom door and inserted the key. The door opened noiselessly. He moved across the long room he knew so well and, feeling for the knob, softly opened the hall door. Sounds carried from the bedroom. Beneath the door, a line of light glowed. Everything else in the room was black.

Imitating the high-pitched voice of the small man, Bart screamed up the hall, "Hey, Ned! Who the hell left this playroom door open?"

He stepped to the side of the doorway, and as the bedroom door crashed open, he raised the pick handle in both hands. The hall flooded with light, sending a broad beam across the playroom floor. Heavy feet stomped down the carpeted hall, and Ned came through the doorway, a forty-five automatic clamped in his huge fist.

When Bart came down with the pick handle, the impact sounded like a sledged steer at a packing plant, and the result was about the same. Ned sank to his knees, then sprawled out on his face.

Leaving the thug where he

lay, Bart retrieved the gun and rushed to the bedroom. Helen and a pretty teen-aged brunette lay bound and gagged on the bed, their eyes wide. He released them and went back to see about Ned. Ned was breathing, but that was about all.

From the rear, powerful lights flooded through the plate-glass windows. A bull horn blared, "Ned Starkey, this is the FBI. We have Corbin and his wife. Come out with your hands up!"

With his own hands up and hoping they wouldn't shoot, Bart went to the open door, facing the blinding glare of searchlights.

"Come in, gentlemen," he called. "Ned can't raise his hands."

After the routine was over, the Stevenses strolled tiredly back toward their home. Lisa swished through the trees as if they had just been on a picnic. Bart was the first to speak. "Are you all right?"

Helen's voice sounded small. "Yes, and Bart—thanks for doing what you did. You could've been killed. But the next time either you or Lisa find a strange light bill, leave it there. When I want my hair frosted, I'll go to the beauty shop."

The Mafia takes care of its own, they say. But—who takes care of the Mafia?

One Gun, One Bullet

by THOMAS CALVERT McCLARY



PRECISELY AT TEN A.M. the headboard of the oversized bed began to breathe forth hifi and the drapes on the windows pulled back upon their electric trolleys. Giuseppe Bartolli, alias Pepe Brown, yawned, swung to the edge of the bed, scratched the mat of iron grey hair upon his still muscular chest, and pulled on silk pajamas that had cost a hundred dollars a pair.

He half turned to consider the young girl lying beside him, looking like a fallen angel in her

crown of golden hair. What was her name?—Ingrid? Sigrid? Well, call her four thousand twenty-six. He took two bills from his wallet and laid them on her long blonde hair, laughing cynically when the young girl reached for them, though still in slumber.

She opened her eyes suddenly and lifted a hand to caress his broken nose.

“How did you get that?” she asked sleepily.

The humor washed off his predatory face. His eyes glinted.

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"Not in college football!" he snapped and got up.

He took a custom made cigarette from a carved jade box and moved into a small adjoining room that served as his private office. He flipped on closed circuit TV and inspected the outer part of his establishment.

The bookkeeper and auditor were at work in their room. His secretary, Gloria, was a picture of Madison Avenue glamor and efficiency, a carafe of coffee on her desk. Jimmy Finnazzo, his bodyguard and handy man, was watching the maids clean up the sixty-foot living room. Such supervision was highly important to keep the place from being bugged. He scanned the cash cage, where Nick Terranova was readying stacks of money for bank deposit. It was a pretty good bank today. That trailer truck of highjacked liquor had not been hay.

Satisfied that his minions were at work, Bartolli went into his gym room for five minutes on the electric bicycle, then five minutes in the sunlamp cabinet. After that, he took a needle shower, with sixteen nozzles spraying him.

Like the girl, all of these gadgets had cost money and he was proud of them. They were symbols of the power and affluence and efficiency of the

Mafia, and its American offshoot, Cosa Nostra. Forty-six years ago, he had come to America lower than a peasant—a broke and homeless outlaw. Today he could buy and sell mayors and senators and judges. He was a prince of crime and above the law. The Mafia took good care of its own.

But the girl's inquiry about his nose still rankled. It raised the humiliating memory of the day a rockfisted young detective named Clyde Donnelley had met him as he left the court, not propped, and smashed him flat in the marble corridor.

"All right, you two-bit junk pusher," Donnelley had rasped. "A crooked fix and your dirty mouthpiece got you off. But I'll see you in hell if it takes me twenty years!"

Bartolli could have broken Donnelley on charges, but he'd have been the laughing stock of the underworld. Since then, the detective had learned to contain his temper. He now had all of the cold calculation of the criminals he pursued, and he was a lieutenant detective, which was big muscle, and he was one man Bartolli couldn't reach. And this was the twentieth year since that day in the corridor.

Bartolli examined his nose in the mirror and cursed the girl

for mentioning it. Then he pulled on fresh lounging pajamas, a silk scarf and embroidered dressing gown and passed back into his bedroom. The press of a button caused a bombproof steel door to slide back into the wall and he moved down a long corridor to his sixty-foot living room and out onto a landscaped terrace that overlooked Central Park.

Standing here, the people beneath looked like crawling ants. Sometimes he'd spit down on them with sheer gratification of the heights he'd reached. This was power such as the princes of the Machiavellis had never known.

Watching him from the back, his young bodyguard thought, "Once he wasn't as tough as me. He shot his way up one by one, each guy ahead of him. And what holds him where he is? Six, maybe eight stinking guns like me, and the freelancers he can hire when he doesn't trust us. Just six or eight, and the Cosa Nostra behind him—and they can spit on the whole United States."

The maids had finished with the living room and Jimmy Finnazzo wheeled out breakfast with the early addition of the evening paper. Bartolli snapped out his napkin as his bodyguard poured his coffee.

"Any messages of importance?"

"Don't you want to eat first, boss?"

Bartolli eyed him. "When you pull that, there's something wrong."

"Well, you had one message. From Detective Lieutenant Donnelley."

Bartolli congealed. He muttered a filthy epithet of hatred. "What did that bastard want?"

"He said to tell you that it hadn't taken quite twenty years. He called on the relay phone."

"Where in hell did he get the number?" Bartolli snarled, eyes narrowed.

The relay phone had been wired through at great expense from an innocuous florist's shop, four blocks distance. Supposedly, the relay wire had been foolproof against trace. Only five people in the city, and Jimmy Finnazzo and himself, knew that number connected here.

"He's sweated somebody and made them sing!" Bartolli growled.

"The girl may have known," Finnazzo suggested. "The one who—uh—ran away."

Bartolli's mouth thinned to a wire slit. "She's dead. If she was a stool, we can't find out now! What did that lousy rat want except to play smart?"

Jimmy Finnazzo nodded nervously at the folded paper. "I guess it's in there. He said you'd want to see it."

Bartolli snapped open the paper and his eyes bulged. The crime headlines fought with each other for space. The Italian police had raided a heroin finishing plant in Palermo. Simultaneously, they had arrested ten Mafia big guns throughout Italy. They were still looking for four additional ones suspected of being in the U.S. and had requested an FBI search.

Bartolli happened to know that two of the wanted men were in the United States, another in Cuba, the fourth in Mexico. They were handling a million dollar smuggling deal, and their trail, if the FBI picked any of them up, would lead right to him.

To make things worse, a dead con had sung before he was liquidated. He'd left tapes and affidavits with a newspaper, and those tapes had definitely identified two underworld agents in the police and Federal Bureau of Narcotics. Even if they beat the rap of a dead man's evidence, it would knock hell out of the smuggling operation. The D.A. would not hesitate to pressure them, and neither would Lieutenant Donnelley. They'd probably have to

make a deal, and that deal would be to sing, and the song they'd sing would be of Bartolli.

He looked up, sweating. He was no cool and haughty prince now. He looked like a cornered animal. His jaws were ashen, there was spittle on his bloodless lips. The big vein pounded a purple line upon his temple.

"Get my mouthpiece and that weasel wardheeler over here right away," he croaked at Finnazzo. "Get word to the Big Five we'll have to meet here this afternoon. Don't phone 'em. That bastard will have every phone we've got tapped."

He cursed and spit. "I should have dumped him twenty years ago!"

"Maybe it's not too late," Finnazzo suggested.

"The hell it isn't! If he called to crow, he's got the muscle somewhere."

"Maybe he's trying to scare you into making a play."

"Yeah? With that setup?" Bartolli hurled the newspaper onto the terrace. "All those things just didn't happen to happen. They've got Interpol in this and they're all going to hit at once."

He sat breathing hard and rubber lipped, staring at the newspaper as if it were a snake. "It was Donnelley," he mut-

tered. "That damned dirty louse cop engineered this. Get me the executioner—I'll fix him yet!"

Suddenly his attention centered on Jimmy Finnazzo and he screamed with rage, "What are you still doing here when I've told you what to do?"

Finnazzo turned quickly toward the door, ticking off his fingers as he muttered, "Kassel, his mouthpiece. Kenneally, the political fixer. Goetz, the torpedo. Olivieri, Lucomo, Morris, Morrissey, and Martel, the syndicate."

Funny, Finnazzo thought, how damn few men it took to run a big operation once you had the muscle and the money. Here were eight men running a fifty million dollar racket. Counting the men from Italy and errand boys like himself, there weren't more than a hundred in the mob. How many U.S. corporations that size did that kind of business—ten million cool profit a year?

Finnazzo crossed the ornate lobby of the hotel apartment. There was a new mail clerk on the desk, a new girl at the cigarette stand, a new doorman. There'd be others among service employees. He stopped at the newsstand to give the new girl the once over and the smell of police came off of her like cheap perfume.

He left the change and made a wisecrack, but his mouth hardened. There were enough police around here for a parade, and the boss owned fifteen percent of this building!

For a moment, Finnazzo hesitated, not used to the necessity for decision. Should he go back and tell the boss they might be setting up a raid? But no, they couldn't grab the boss this quick. They couldn't grab him until they'd grabbed others, and the concrete evidence of a smuggling pickup or knocking off a cutting plant. He'd get over to Kassel and provide his own insurance too against arrest while he had the chance.

JIMMY FINNAZZO got into the parked Mercedes and drove with no effort to throw off a police tail. Let 'em see the boss had reached Kassel. The police thought twice about manhandling one of his clients.

He beat the police into the lobby of Kassel's building. The mob had a payroll contact at the newsstand. Picking up late editions, he told the newsman, "Phone Pete at the garage to bring down the black Caddy and park it on the side street."

The man counted out his change and nodded. One of the police came into the lobby as he strolled toward the elevators

and took position beside a post.

Kassel already knew all about the case. He said, "Tell your boss they picked up Orlando. Lucomó called me to get him sprung, but your boss is all the heat I can hold. Right now, he's the hottest thing in America. His pomaded hair is singing."

"The boss wants you over to his apartment," Finnazzo said.

Kassel gave him a fish-eyed stare and a chopped laugh. "What's he want to do, tell the police and FBI his whole business? That place is bugged like Symphony Hall."

"Like hell," Finnazzo bridled. "You couldn't get a mike the size of a dime in there without me knowing."

Kassel laughed again. "Your walls and ceiling are just one big ear, chump. For a fish the size of Bartolli, they use the Dick Tracy equipment. Tell him to come over here, but keep away from any place of business and don't let any stranger at all into the apartment. They may have a body warrant."

Jimmy Finnazzo lit a cigarette and exhaled slowly. "This bad trouble?"

"We can beat 'em in court, but right now with the FBI on things and all this publicity, it's hot. It's too late for the boss to skip jurisdiction. He couldn't sneak it even as a corpse."

"How about me?" Finnazzo asked.

The lawyer looked at him with new appraisal. "You going to take a powder?"

"No. I mean, who takes care of me if I get in trouble?"

Kassel gave that speculative thought.

"You're small fry, Jimmy," he said finally. "But you could grow big pretty fast the way this is running, if you don't try to get too big. Just don't get too hungry. You've got my home phone. Call me personal if they grab you."

Finnazzo nodded and got up. He said, "The boss wants to see Kenneally, too."

Kassel shrugged. "That's up to Kenneally, but I doubt if you'll find him in town. He's too close to City Hall to take a chance on meeting right now."

Finnazzo nodded again and left, walking around to the passenger elevators and spotting no detective waiting. So he was waiting in the lobby, simply a routine shadow job.

Jimmy Finnazzo went around to the service elevator and got quick service to the basement for a sawbuck. Another ten at the check door got him out into the loading alley. His exit would be reported, but it wouldn't matter. This gave him the chance to pick up the Caddy

while the cops were watching the Mercedes and the front door.

He had to make choices and decisions now. It wouldn't be long before Donnelley's boys would realize he'd given them the slip and put out a general call. For practical purposes, Goetz, the executioner, was the hottest of those he had to contact, so he drove up Broadway to find Goetz.

He caught him having breakfast in the third delicatessen he stopped at.

Goetz didn't even glance up. From the side of his mouth, he said, "Get away from me. I don't know you, Jimmy."

"The boss has a contract for you. A big one," Finnazzo said in the same flat tone.

"I'm on call," Goetz said, but added, "How big?"

"Big big."

Goetz chewed a chunk of waffle. "I'll stop by," he muttered. His weasel face held a cryptic look.

"The lobby's full of cops," Finnazzo said.

Goetz jerked his head at the paper. "What else? I've seen cops before. They've got nothing on me."

Jimmy Finnazzo moved on past the table, ordering coffee at the counter, which he left half untouched.

He drove over to Kenneally's

club and was greeted by an anguished, "For cripe's sake, get lost fast, willya? He ain't here, he ain't in town and he can't be reached by phone."

"The boss won't like that," Finnazzo said.

"No?" the political stooge started to snarl, then thought better of it. "Well, tell him my boss is doing what he can, but he don't want to be in contact."

Jimmy Finnazzo nodded and moved back down the long flight of stairs. A passing prowler eyed him as he moved toward his car. Their interest did not look as if there'd been an alert yet. He thought of the remaining things he had to do and felt the growing tension of decision. Finally, he walked to the corner phone and called his boss.

Bartolli yelled, "What in hell—"

"Listen," Finnazzo cut in recklessly, "Kassel says for you to come to his office. The other man left word he knows but doesn't want to talk right now. You want me to do the rest of the business or come back now?"

"Damn it, I told you what to do!" Bartolli barked savagely.

"Our lobby's hot—" Finnazzo ventured.

"Damn the lobby!" Bartolli exploded. Then he rasped, "No,

wait. Tell the boys we'll meet at the store. The usual time." He banged up. Bartolli seldom banged the phone even in anger. His nerves were singing.

Finnazzo drove to Brooklyn, to Olivieri's labor office. The gang boss was feverishly supervising the gathering of papers to be destroyed. "What the hell's wrong with Pepe, wanting a meeting now?" he rasped.

"You know the boss," Finnazzo said. "Always ready for the punch."

"Yeah, he was sure ready!" the gangster snorted. He looked speculative. "How's he taking it?"

"He knows what he's doing." Finnazzo said. "He's got reason to be a little nervous with Donnelley in this."

"That old vendetta? He should have dumped that lousy cop. So he wants to meet at the supermarket. All right, I've got the message."

JIMMY FINNAZZO made the rounds of Morris, Morrissey and Martel. He had an idea that Martel already knew he was coming. Martel took time to give him a drink and ask details about the apartment stakeout. He was an enormous man who chewed up expensive cigars the way a crocodile would chew a baby. He had started in Murder Inc. and he still liked the

human torch method of execution.

Finally the mobster said just what Olivieri had said: "How's he taking it?"

"He's hot but not on the spot, his mouthpiece says. It's mostly the publicity."

"That's enough! You can always get another trial but you can't get another million dollar operation just for asking for it. We don't even know if we can kill this deal before the stuff's on its way here. He still got communications with Mexico and Cuba?"

"You'll have to ask him," Finnazzo said. "You boys aren't nervous, are you?"

"Yeah, I'm good and nervous," Olivieri growled. "Pepe's hot as hell with five different police out gunning for him and a personal vendetta with the louse who must have cooked up the United States end of this. Except that I've a big piece of change advanced on this, I wouldn't even want to know your boss until this cools off."

"So what do I tell him?" Finnazzo grunted.

"Tell him you delivered the message. Now get out. I've got some calls to make."

Jimmy Finnazzo moved out past Olivieri's torpedoes. They nodded, but he felt a coolness that was far from the usual camaraderie. It was gang neigh-

borhood where he was known, and there was a decided lack of enthusiasm from acquaintances he saw on the street.

He had to drive back to the city's Little Italy now to reach Lucomo, and he drove back the long way through the neighborhoods he had just visited. There was a noticeable emptiness of hangouts. The tension of a quiet before the storm was like a smell from the tougher streets.

He saw new faces that hadn't been around when he drove over. Some of them were Donnelley's top men. The others were roaming detectives—watching, waiting. It didn't look like a stakeout for a pinch, but it did look like a blanketing of the gang haunts.

What were the cops trying to do—prevent a meeting or catch the whole bunch together? Or just making muscles—putting on heat to give the boys the jitters? It looked like a scare game and obvious, but it might work.

It would set every gang chief in the syndicate jittery and wondering who had sung what—and wondering if somebody was trying to finger him. There was fear a plenty but damned little trust or loyalty in the Mafia.

Finnazzo crossed by the bridge. He could lose himself better in truck traffic than in



the tunnel, where a car could be checked through by TV. Parking the Caddie, he walked through Little Italy to a vegetable stand, where a taxi was parked amidst a clutter of empty boxes along the curb. As he reached the stand, Goetz, the Dutchman, came out toward the cab, giving Finnazzo a fast double take. Goetz hesitated, then stopped to light a cigarette.

"You seen my boss yet?" Finnazzo mouthed as he came up.

"No, Jimmy. I'm still on call," Goetz said. "I'll try to make it tonight or tomorrow." The killer-for-hire puffed, ex-

haled a stream of smoke and got into the waiting cab.

Finnazzo picked up a nectarine and thoughtfully watched the cab driver off. Goetz was stalling. A killer didn't stall on arranging a big contract. A big one would run ten, fifteen, maybe twenty grand. An executioner would want that contract in his pocket. He'd also want to know who he was going to hit, just in case there was conflict in whatever he was doing for Lucomo.

It could be that the syndicate meant to sacrifice the big boss to save their own skins.

Finnazzo turned into the store, picked out half a dozen nectarines, and at a nod from the fruit man, passed into the rear of the store and through a narrow door into the hallway of the adjoining building.

He climbed a rickety flight of stairs and gave a tattoo on the metal sheathed door of an old speakeasy. He was examined through a peephole, admitted into a hall where two goons frisked him before passing him through, first to one room filled with smoke, and then through another steel door to Lucomo's private office.

Lucomo sat like a big lethal toad behind a desk. "You tell Pepe I don't like his mouth-

piece refusing to act for Orlando," he growled. "Looks like somebody maybe made a deal to toss him to the D.A."

"Kassel did that on his own," Finnazzo said. "He was scared the newspapers would make a connection of it if he handled him."

"So the papers don't know there's a connection?" Lucomo snorted.

Jimmy Finnazzo shrugged. "You can tell the boss yourself. He wants a meeting at the store, at four o'clock."

Lucomo leaned back and chewed on his cigar and studied Finnazzo with his toadlike eyes. "That would make it nice and easy for the police to grab us all at once. Hunh?"

"He can't talk on the phone, he can't meet you in public. This may be his last chance to decide what to do," Jimmy Finnazzo said. "The cops don't know that spot."

"Last chance, all right. That Donnelley knows too much. Word I get is that he knew a lot before he picked up Orlando."

Finnazzo made a gesture. "I'm just the messenger."

Lucomo chewed his cigar across his face. "Okay, You've messaged."

Then, as Jimmy Finnazzo started to leave, he said, "Wait."

He studied Finnazzo with his

shrewd; emotionless eyes. Then he said, "No. You'd goof. You're still a slob. Breeze."

Finnazzo left by the same route he'd come. He wondered what had been on Lucomo's mind. Maybe the same thing he was holding Goetz on call for? It was a scary thought. If they were set to blast the boss, he'd better get the word to him. But then he thought, why? better that he take care of himself—while there still was time.

JIMMY FINNAZZO parked his car at a Lucomo garage, stopped at Whitey's for veal scallopini, and borrowed a panel truck to drive to the supermarket. The last of the day's delivery trucks had pulled out of the loading port. The checker was just closing the double steel doors.

"Don't lock up," Finnazzo ordered. "We're pulling out some overstock tonight."

The man nodded, knowing Finnazzo only as someone who had authority, and passed him through.

Jimmy Finnazzo turned through the cluttered storage area to a cement blockhouse in the center. Supposedly, it was a no longer used refrigeration room. Actually, it was one of the syndicate meeting rooms, and his job now was to inspect it carefully for hidden micro-

phones and boobies. He flipped on the air conditioning and inspected it inch by inch.

After that he inspected the phone and then the electric controls of two escape hatches, a steel plate in the ceiling giving access to the building's roof, and a cement trap door in the floor that led to the cellar.

The place was clean and everything was in working order. He rinsed glasses at a sink, and set out liquor, cigars and ashtrays from a cabinet. At twenty to four, he turned to the delivery door and told the check guard he could beat it. Left alone in the silence of the storeroom, he unlocked what looked like a fuse box and took out an automatic, an armpit harness and a sawed off shotgun.

At five after four, he paced the loading platform nervously. It was a matter of pride with the bosses to be a few minutes late, but their goons usually scouted out the whole area at least fifteen minutes before the bosses arrived. At four thirteen, Binks Hammond came through from the store side. Hammond was one of the boss's muscle men who doubled as driver when Jimmy Finnazzo was not on hand.

"The boss is in the store," Binks grunted. "Everything clear?"

"Clear as mud," Finnazzo snapped. "You better stand guard by the buzzer at the front door. If you see cops or hoods, don't wait to signal."

"Yeah? What's wrong?"

"Something smelly. But tell the boss it's all clear now."

Hammond vanished back through the storeroom. Shortly, Giuseppe Bartolli appeared, expensively dressed and moving with executive arrogance, an attache case under his arm. Finnazzo closed and bolted the back door and went to admit him through the soundproof refrigerator door of the blockhouse.

Bartolli stopped dead in midstride, his face mottling with anger as he stared into the empty room.

"What in hell did you tell them?" he snarled.

"The usual time. Four o'clock."

"Did they act funny, any of 'em—Lucomo especial?"

"Not particularly. A little twitchy maybe, but their neighborhoods were getting heavy with cops."

"That bastard Donnelley!" Bartolli swore. "He's pulling something."

He banged his attache case on the meeting table. He poured a stiff drink and downed it in a gulp.

"Call the message service."

Finnazzo dialed the number and gave the phony name they used for messages. There were none. By itself, that was incredible.

Bartolli was ashen with mixed fury and fear. "Call their lawyers. See if anybody's been picked up," he said hoarsely.

Jimmy Finnazzo phoned four different lawyers who represented them in the lesser criminal procedures such as bail, habeas corpus, and contact with top mouthpiece when needed. None knew of any particular trouble in the past several hours. Orlando had already been sprung, they conveyed in gambling code. At this point it looked as if everything might simmer down to sensational news reports and little else.

"Like hell! Those dumb bastards!" Bartolli yelled hoarsely. "Lucomo, Martel, the others too. Don't they know this is the last chance we may get to meet? It took me over an hour to throw off a police tail."

He lighted a cigar and stalked the room muttering stormily and spreading a sheet of smoke. He sent Finnazzo out to case the alley and the adjoining street, then the store itself and that street. There was no sign of either cops or mobsters or any of their goons.

He had him phone various

contact numbers. None of the syndicate members had been seen around since earlier afternoon. They'd left no messages.

At ten past five, Bartolli crouched in a chair and drank from a bottle without pouring. He had chewed through two cigars. Frayed particles had pasted into the vertical snarl lines that grew deeper around his mouth. He was roaring but fear was rising in his eyes.

"Donnelley couldn't have pulled all this alone," he rasped. "Those lousy mobsters made a deal. They've sold me out. They're going to leave me hold the bag alone!"

Bartolli smashed the bottle on the table. "I can beat them and without going outside this fort! I've got enough evidence to fry them all!"

He was alternately roaring and whispering, jumping from one wild possibility to another. Even Jimmy Finnazzo could see that. The others couldn't sell him out without implicating themselves. And they wouldn't do that until the D.A. was breathing ten years down their necks. But they might think he was pulling a double cross to get them out of the picture and take over the whole racket, and Donnelley was not above putting out such rumors. That would give his detective blanket a more serious color.

It would look like a dragnet ready to whip tight at some particular moment, such as catching all of the gang chiefs together at this meeting. So they had holed up until they could learn exactly what and how much Donnelley really knew. It was a standoff, but Bartolli was taking it for a fix.

That would also account for the Dutchman's stall. Goetz was on call, all right. He was on standby to hit the boss if the others decided it was necessary.

BUT YOU DIDN'T tell Giuseppe Bartolli that a cop had outsmarted him, that he'd lost his nerve and was thinking wild. Not if you wanted to live, you didn't.

Bartolli swilled down another drink and sat there breathing in huge whistling gasps.

"The lice," he muttered thickly. "They didn't have the guts to face me because I'd read 'em. So they've sold out to that rat cop and cut out of the picture."

He suddenly erupted in violent fury. "I'll fix them all and that rat cop too! Get that top punk at the FBI," he yelled.

Jimmy Finnazzo felt himself go cold and moist. This kind of cross was the beginning of the end, either way the cards fell.

Bartolli might fix the mob, but others would hit him for it, and anyone close to his business. But the passport out of trouble lay right there on the table in that attache case.

Finnazzo stood beside his boss, dialing the FBI phone, feeling his back go taut as wire. He asked for the agent by name and said it was Pepe Brown calling.

There was a touch of excitement in the operator's voice as he said, "Just a minute."

"They're getting him," Finnazzo said. He handed the phone to his boss. He knew exactly what that "just a minute" meant. The agent was out of the office, probably up at their own hotel. The FBI switchboard would have to run through another call for a connection.

Bartolli chewed his cigar impatiently, his fist white with tension around the phone. Jimmy Finnazzo stepped away from the table to move around him. Bartolli didn't even notice until he felt the cold muzzle of the gun. He never even heard the shot reverberate from the cement walls of the enclosed room.

Finnazzo leaned over his sprawled figure and clicked off the phone connection. Then he wiped off fingerprints and put

Bartolli's relaxing hand back upon the instrument. His own prints were all over the room, of course, but with no probable motive and no weapon, the D.A. would have a hard time making a case against Kassel's defense.

"One gun, one shot," he laughed nervously. He opened the trap door to the roof and left it open. It meant nothing, but Kassel would make it an additional point of confusion. He reached Bartolli's heavy wallet, the one with the five hundred and thousand dollar banknotes he carried for emergency.

He wiped the gun clean of fingerprints, picked up the attache case and went back to the loading platform to toss them on the seat of the panel truck. Then he thought of Hammond. No sense letting him go haywire before the dumb cluck got wise that he was no longer employed.

He passed back through the storeroom and into the store and found Hammond at his signal post. "Boss wants us to get the cars out of the neighborhood fast," he said. "He'll take a cab."

"The big boys show up?" Hammond asked curiously.

"He's got a contact in there now," Finnazzo said.

He watched the goon head

for the car in front. He returned to the panel truck and took time to light a cigarette. His biggest problem now would be to dispose of the murder weapon. He thought of what Lucomo had almost said, and grinned. He'd made his explanation and deal with the Big Five for the contents of that attache case, and they'd certainly bless him.

And he'd still have time to run through Bartolli's private files at the apartment and sneak out what he wanted before the police or FBI got wise and had an excuse to come after him.

He had his hand on the ignition when a relentless, mocking voice came from immediately behind him. "Well, well, Jimmy boy, leaving the boss all to his lonesome?"

In his mind's eye, Finnazzo caught the picture. There was a half partition behind the seat and Donnelley had crouched behind it. The boss never had lost him; he'd been tailed and this smart cop had just waited for the breaks.

"Pepe left by the front door. Hammond's driving him," Finnazzo blurted in panic.

"Jimmy boy, you shouldn't lie," Donnelley said. "We've got a walkie talkie staked out in front. Mr. Pepe Brown-Giusep-

pe Bartolli is still inside. Blown to hell and gone, I hope—but that is strictly unofficial. The Mafia takes good care of its own, doesn't it, Jimmy boy?"

"The Mafia big boys are bad enough," he added. "But you small time hangers-on are worse. Big Pepe at least had loyalty to you rats. He was stupid enough to think he could trust you. That was his mistake. And you—your mistake was in thinking you could climb into a pair of brogans that were a lot too big for you, dirty though they were."

He grinned bleakly, and it somehow was worse than a gang death sentence.

A wild retching sound ripped from Finnazzo's throat. Recklessly, he threw himself and grabbed a gun off the seat and twisted to fire in back of him.

Donnelley laughed softly as the hammer clicked on empty. "I took the trouble to remove the remaining shells while you were inside getting rid of Hammond," He said. "But I'm obliged for putting your prints back upon the murder weapon. Now, Jimmy boy, let's go back and see how your boss's health is."

The door wrenched open and handcuffs clicked upon Jimmy Finnazzo's wrist.

*Happiness was behind him.
Death lay straight ahead. But
there was this one chance . . .*

HIGHWAY HOSTAGE

by

CARL HENRY RATHJEN

MEL BANDON felt the gun jam deeper into his side as he sped the sedan on the dark freeway.

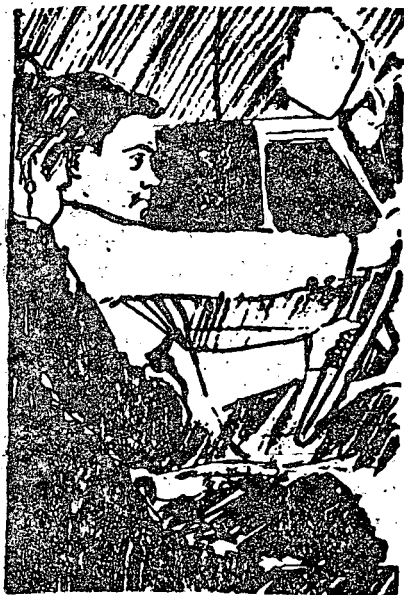
"Slow down, please," said the man, the killer whose neat appearance and suave manner suggested the lethal restraint of a coiled snake.

Bandon shuddered inwardly, but surprised himself with his manner. "Why say please?"

Mr. Suave chuckled. "I always observe the amenities when there is a lady present."

In the rearview mirror the lights of a car far behind outlined the tense silhouette of Lea, the carhop who had been abducted with Bandon. He wondered if she were thinking the same thing he was, that life could suddenly become so potentially short it was a pity that previous happiness had been held at arm's length.

It had been the usual tonight



when he'd stopped by on his way south to spend tomorrow extending his sales territory. Lea had wished him luck, but refused to share it as his wife unless her children, by a former marriage which had left her a widow, were included from the start, not some vague time later on. No angry arguments, just a quiet impasse.

Feeling she wanted to saddle him with unwanted responsibilities, but hoping to wear her down when she finished work shortly, he'd stepped around to the washroom—entering just as Mr. Suave finished removing a handcuff from his left wrist as he leaned over the body of a man whose eyes stared at the

ceiling. Releasing the dead man's manacled wrist, Mr. Suave reached under the body's coat and whipped out a gun, which he pointed at Bandon.

"Let's not try to tell anyone else about this," he'd said smoothly. "I'll have your car keys, please."

"Left them in the car," he said tensely. "Who doesn't in a drive in?"

"What are we waiting for then?" Mr. Suave motioned him toward the door. "What are you driving?"

"Aren't you particular?"

"Anticipatory. You might try to trick me by taking someone else's car, since people leave their keys in the ignition in drive-ins. What kind of car?"

Bandon let his breath out with a resigned sigh. "Olds 98." He felt the gun between them as they moved outside. Mr. Suave chatted casually about the good weather and lack of traffic tonight. None of the car-diners paid any attention, neither did those inside at the tables and counter.

Lea came out, carrying her purse. Bandon was going to ignore her, but Mr. Suave spotted her look of recognition.

"Welcome to the party," he said, taking her arm with his free hand. "I've heard so much about you I feel we're already acquainted."

With a heavy feeling of dread Bandon moved on past a sports car and station wagon to the big sedan. He saw Lea flick a glance toward the restaurant. If she screamed or tried to attract attention, life was going to be very short for him.

He almost expected that McAllister, plastics salesman, would turn from the counter. McAllister always drove in the same nights as Bandon and knew of the impasse with Lea, and usually gave them a very sad look as they left in Bandon's car. But tonight, of all nights, he didn't.

With Bandon driving, they took to the highway. Lea sat in back. Mr. Suave kept the gun pointed at Bandon and turned so he could also watch Lea.

"The speed limit is seventy," he said as Bandon crowded on the gas. "Let's hold it down to sixty-five so as not to annoy the highway patrol."

Bandon glanced at the gun. "Is there going to be any difference if I cooperate or risk that now?"

Mr. Suave smiled. "You'll cooperate, because you're a victim of the myth that there will always be a happy ending."

Bandon glanced in the mirror at Lea's silhouette. There were cardboard boxes on the shelf behind her, and on the

seat beside her.

"What happy ending?" he remarked bitterly. "The kids aren't going to get those toys now."

Mr. Suave chuckled. "Is that a play for my sympathy? The poor little millstones. They keep a man chained to the myth."

Bandon glanced in the mirror again. Lea seemed to be looking at Mr. Suave, who laughed and reached toward the radio.

"Suppose we see if there's any news about us—or the fool who tried to play hero and pick me up single-handed."

"You turn it on here," Bandon said cooperatively. He reached out suddenly, thankful that the radio wasn't push-bottom. He tore the knob off and flipped it out the window.

"Now try turning it with your fingers or pliers, if you have them."

In answer to his challenge, the gun rammed into him. "Go ahead," Bandon said, "I told you I'd expect the worst."

Mr. Suave wasn't quite so suave. "All right. What's the gimmick? Your ace in the hole for that myth?"

"She already told you," Bandon replied, sweating. "Two kids."

During the diversion of attention, Bandon ran his speed up so it would have been unsafe

to attempt an exit ramp that Mr. Suave had ordered him to take.

"You'll take the next one," Bandon was warned. "Start slowing down now or—"

Road flares appeared around an unfolding curve where Brandon knew the police always made roadblocks. In the instant that they caught Mr. Suave's attention, Bandon grabbed the gun and swung it pointing toward the dash. Lea lunged forward and hugged her arms blindingly around Mr. Suave's head.

The car screeched up to the waiting police.

Bandon and Lea had a few moments alone as the police ringed Mr. Suave outside the car.

"There are some important things I want to talk over with you and the kids."

Lea smiled. "I don't think that will be necessary."

A policeman called them to the group about Mr. Suave. "This lug wants to know how come we were out here when we didn't know there was a murder. Maybe you'd like to tell him."

Bandon gestured toward the get-away sedan.

"I stole McAllister's car. Mine's a station wagon. I figured you'd sure come after

me."

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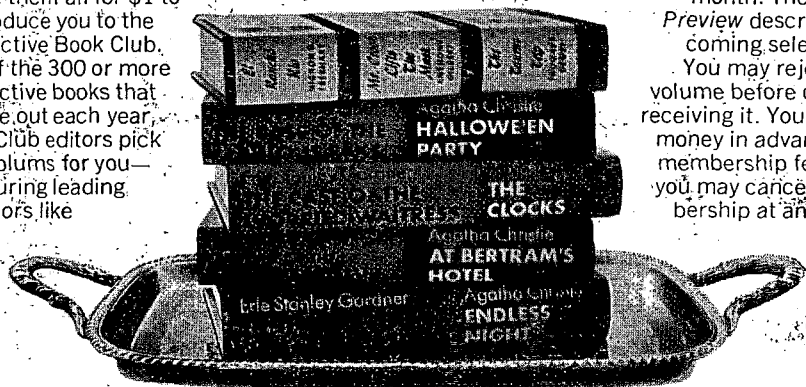
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